

**From Witches and Whispering Vampires to Obese Detectives –  
Constructing Normality through Abnormality in John Dickson  
Carr's Gideon Fell Series**

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Master's Thesis  
June 2016

Tampereen yliopisto  
Kieli-, käännös- ja kirjallisuustieteiden yksikkö  
Englannin kieli ja kirjallisuus

PALMÉN, TANELI: From Witches and Whispering Vampires to Obese Detectives –  
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Pro gradu -tutkielma, 90 sivua + 1 liitesivu  
Kesäkuu 2016

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Tutkielma tarkastelee normaaliuden käsitteen rakentumista epänormaaliin käyttäytymiseen verrattuna kirjailija John Dickson Carrin Tohtori Gideon Fell -dekkarisarjan neljässä valikoidussa romaanissa. Analysoitavina sarjan romaaneista ovat *Vääntynyt Sarana* (1938), *Kuiskaava kuolema* (1946), *The Sleeping Sphinx* (1947) sekä *The House at Satan's Elbow* (1965). Romaaneissa esiintyviä hahmoja sekä heidän käytöstään tutkitaan poikkeavuuteen ja vammaisuuteen keskittyvien teorioiden kautta. Lisäksi hahmoja analysoidaan dekkarin lajityypille ominaisten ominaisuuksien kautta.

Kirjojen kirjoittamisen aikoina 1930-luvulta 1960-luvulle Britanniassa oli meneillään monia muutoksia, erityisesti psykologian ja psykoanalyysin merkitykset korostuivat aiempaa enemmän ihmisten pyrkiessä määrittelemään normaaliutta ja poikkeavuutta yhteiskunnassa. Varsinkin toisen maailmansodan jälkeen psykoseksuaalisten poikkeavuuksien tärkeys normaaliuden määrittelemisessä korostui ja tämä näkyy myös Tohtori Fell -sarjassa.

Romaaneissa esiintyvät hahmot noudattavat suhteellisen tarkasti dekkarikirjallisuuden lajityypin arkkityypeille ominaisia piirteitä. Liikuntavammaista päähenkilöä, Gideon Felliä, avustaa jokaisessa tarinassa romaanin varsinainen päähenkilö ja fokalisoija, niin sanottu Watson-hahmo. Watson-hahmot kirjoissa toimivat samalla lukijalle tärkeinä samaistuttavina henkilöinä, joiden kautta lukijalle avautuu kirjojen luokkayhteiskunnan ajatusmaailma sekä käsitykset normaalista käytöksestä. Rikolliset ja uhrit romaaneissa puolestaan edustavat kukin omalla tavallaan epänormaaliutta tai epänormaalia käytöstä kirjojen kuvaamassa yhteiskunnassa.

Hahmojen poikkeavuudet koetaan tuomittavina jos kyseessä on rikollinen tai niitä pyritään ymmärtämään jos poikkeavuus johtuu esimerkiksi jonkinlaisesta henkisestä häiriöstä tai vammasta. Nämä viimeksi mainitut hahmot, jotka kirjojen kuvaama yhteiskunta käsittää poikkeavina, Fell pyrkiikin liittämään takaisin yhteiskuntaan sellaisina kuin he jo ovat. Tutkielma väittää, että Fellin hahmon kautta romaanit yrittävät ajalle epätyypillisesti lisätä ymmärrystä psykoseksuaalisesti poikkeavia kohtaan.

Avainsanat: detective fiction, deviance, disability, genre studies, John Dickson Carr

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis focuses its analysis on the constructions of abnormality and normality through the depictions of disability and social deviance found in the characters in John Dickson Carr's Doctor Gideon Fell detective fiction series, which was written and published between the years 1933 and 1967. Of the 23 novels in the Gideon Fell series, this thesis will focus on the novels *The Crooked Hinge* (1938), *He Who Whispers* (1946), *The Sleeping Sphinx* (1947) and *The House at Satan's Elbow* (1965). Not only will these novels cover a wide timeframe and thus provide a good sample of works representing the nature of the series as a whole, but they also feature some of the more distinct physical and mental deviations and disabilities in the series. In addition, although the other Doctor Fell novels contain many aspects of deviance and disability in their narratives, these are usually not the main focal point of the narrative as is more strongly the case with the four novels chosen for analysis.

John Dickson Carr (1906–1977), despite being one of the most prolific writers of the so-called Golden Age of Detective Fiction of the period between the 1920s and 1940s, has also been one of the most neglected ones academically speaking. In most academic works where Carr is included, his works are often either only mentioned, briefly discussed, or not looked at in any greater detail. S.T. Joshi's *John Dickson Carr: A Critical Study* (1990) remains the most thorough academic piece of writing on Carr and his work and will be used as background material in this thesis. While Joshi does claim that when it came to social issues in the real world "Carr, fundamentally, had nothing to say" (139), his view neglects to consider the social implications raised by Carr's use of deviant behavior and the plethora of depictions of disabled minds and bodies he employed in his detective fiction writing throughout his career, these depictions gaining especial prominence in his works immediately following World War II. What makes these matters of depiction more significant and stand out in the field of fair-play whodunit detective fiction, the subgenre Carr primarily wrote in, is the fact that in

Carr's work most of these depictions, especially those concerning social deviancy, are not limited to those exhibited by criminals as would often be the case in the genre otherwise.

In this thesis I will seek to argue against this perceived notion of Carr's work having had nothing important to say, as demonstrated by claims such as the previously quoted one of Joshi's, by employing the theoretical fields of disability studies, deviancy studies and genre studies. Disability studies as defined by academics such as Simi Linton (2005, 518) "aims to expose the ways that disability has been made exceptional and to work to naturalize disabled people . . . whose often distorted representations in art, literature, film, theater, and other forms of artistic expression are fully analyzed." This idea of distortion, or abnormality, when combined with the central tenet of deviancy studies according to Christiana Gregoriou (2007, 1) of exploring "what we take to be normal or acceptable and that which is not", will allow a deeper understanding of the ideas presented about normality and abnormality present in Carr's work. Furthermore, unlike what might be presupposed of classical detective fiction, the concept of abnormality constructed within the Gideon Fell series is not limited to those facets of it the criminals themselves exhibit; additionally, in some cases the tone in which certain supposed abnormal characters are depicted is understanding rather than condemning. Therefore, one of my central arguments is that the novels are both labelist, a term essentially meaning the condemning of a person as a deviant breaker of social norms and rules (Alvarez 1968, 900), and anti-labelist depending on the character being examined, their abnormality and the context they are being examined in. I will strive to prove that the novels are labelist when criminally deviant behavior is encountered on the one hand, and anti-labelist when disability – or deviant behavior brought on by disability – is encountered on the other. This is especially important when the recent academic trend of using abnormality to gain an understanding of normality is considered, as Gregoriou (91) admits, "In fact, one important reason that has underlined recent studies in abnormal behaviour was the idea that abnormality can assist in the understanding of normal behaviour and processes that govern it."

New insight into how normality was constructed in the publication period of the novels can thus be gained by analyzing Carr's work, especially given the heavy use of abnormality in his novels.

A further justification for specifically focusing on the aspect of disability when it comes to detective fiction can be found in discovering that the analysis of detective fiction under the lens of disability studies in particular is still in its infancy. Ria Cheyne (2012, 119–120) states that academic interest in literary and cultural disability studies has steadily increased over the years ever since the publication of Lennard J. Davis' book *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* in 1995; however, she also makes conscious note of the lack of attention that the field has had when it comes to the study of crime fiction and its subgenres:

In the well-developed body of scholarly work on crime, detective, and mystery fiction, for example, there are books on race and ethnicity in the genre, but none on disability. Even works whose titles would suggest the necessity of critical engagement with disability – such as Gill Plain's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* or Christiana Gregoriou's *Deviance in Contemporary Crime Fiction* – show little evidence of a disability-informed perspective. (117)

Given Carr's heavy use of disability in his narratives, and the fact that critics such as Joshi have never examined this aspect of his work before, the use of disability studies to analyze this aspect of his work seems more than long due and appropriate.

Finally, the field of genre studies in this case analyses how a work of detective fiction is constructed and perceived through its conventions and internal structure. The fair-play subgenre of the whodunit is largely formulaic in nature, and as such these conventions, and the internal structure of these works, operate on a set of recognizable standards and principles. This is important because, as John G. Cawelti states, "Standard conventions establish common ground between writers and audiences" (1976, 8); in this case common ground translates into shared genre expectations between both writers and readers of detective fiction. In addition, I plan to use the guidelines for writing Golden Age detective fiction written by Ronald Knox in 1929, *Father Knox's Decalogue: The Ten Rules of (Golden Age) Detective Fiction*, as a manifestation of the kind of generic expectations of the

fair-play whodunit subgenre that readers of the genre were, and in many respects still are, accustomed to (see Appendix). I will return to these points more fully where relevant later in the theory section.

During his career Carr created three major detective figures who featured in the main body of his detective stories: Sir Henry Merrivale, Doctor Gideon Fell and Henri Bencolin. Of these figures, Gideon Fell, likened by many critics such as Fredrerick W. Hafferty and Susan Foster to Nero Wolfe, a similarly obese detective of the 1930s (1994, 189), is the one most worthy of further study in light of his position as an academically neglected ‘defective detective’: a term referring to detectives who are either mentally or physically somehow impaired (ibid.), and who are “always out of the mainstream. Their most notable features will almost surely differentiate them clearly from most readers” (Goldman 2011, 267). In the novels, Doctor Fell is described as so corpulent that he needs two canes to walk, yet he is still of the “super cripp” type of impaired detective that is surprisingly common in the genre (Hafferty and Foster, 189), who is impaired in some physical capacity and yet is “remedially endowed with super-human intellect” (ibid.). While Doctor Fell’s character has been somewhat studied in past research, usually in his emblematic role of restoring social order after solving a crime in the English countryside (Grella 1970, 39), he and the series of novels he appears in have never been studied in terms of disability or social deviance.

The first novel to be analyzed, *The Crooked Hinge* (*CH* for citation purposes), details an identity dispute between two men claiming to be John Farnleigh, the heir to the Kentish estate of Farnleigh Close. Farnleigh, a survivor of the sinking of the Titanic, had been living in America until the death of his older brother, his only relative, whereupon he returns to Kent as head of the estate in 1936. In July 1937 another man arrives, claiming to be the real John Farnleigh, and that he can prove it. Before the identity dispute can be resolved, the incumbent claimant is murdered in sight of several witnesses by an invisible attacker, and the evidence needed to resolve the identity dispute is stolen. With the police baffled, Doctor Fell begins investigating the case in order to dispel any notion of witchcraft being involved and to find the real culprit.

*He Who Whispers* (HWW for citation purposes), set in postwar England, tells the story of Miles Hammond, the Watson of the story, who is invited to attend a dinner party at the Murder Club – a gathering of amateur sleuths – where he meets Professor Rigaud, who describes to Miles the murder case of Howard Brooke in the prewar French countryside. Brooke was murdered atop an abandoned tower while the tower was being observed by a family on picnic. However, once the body is discovered, the family swear to having seen no one enter or exit the tower in the time that Brooke was alone. The only person that Rigaud, who found the body, considers a possible murder suspect is a young woman working as Brooke's secretary called Fay Seton, whom the locals and Rigaud himself considered a vampire. The case stays at the back of Miles's mind as the woman he has hired to work for him turns out to be Fay. When Miles's sister is nearly killed of fright with only Miles and Fay present, Doctor Fell arrives to investigate both the old murder and the new, attempted one.

*The Sleeping Sphinx* (SS for citation purposes) chronicles the unexplained and sudden death of Margot Marsh in her home after a party. Margot's sister, Celia, is convinced that Margot's husband had been secretly abusing her and eventually murdered her. With the police unconvinced, the family doctor suggesting that Celia may be insane, and the unexplained moving of the coffins in the family crypt, Celia sends a letter to Doctor Fell, asking for his help in both proving her sanity but also that her sister was murdered.

*The House at Satan's Elbow* (HSE for citation purposes) describes the attempted murder of Pennington Barclay in Greengrove, his home estate, by a culprit who managed to vanish through a locked window in the room Barclay was in. Matters at Greengrove are further complicated by the discovery of a new will left by the former master of the estate, awarding the estate to Barclay's nephew, and the appearances made by a ghostly figure resembling the 18th-century hanging judge Justice Wildfare. Gideon Fell is called in with the police to solve the attempted murder and the matter of the ghost.



## 2. Deviancy, disability and genre studies

In this chapter I will introduce the three theoretical approaches used in this thesis, those of disability studies, deviancy studies and genre studies, in addition to those central concepts and definitions from these particular fields of theory which will be employed in the analysis. In so doing I hope to establish a clear theoretical framework and viewpoint which will be used in the analysis of the four novels in the later chapters. The fields of disability and deviancy studies I combine in order to form an understanding of the concepts of normality and abnormality evident in the characters in the primary material. The theories of genre studies, on the other hand, will be employed in defining both the generic limitations placed upon Carr by the fair-play whodunit subgenre and formula, as well as the ways in which the reader's understanding of text in this subgenre would be affected by the expectations they have based on their prior knowledge of the genre and its typical features. While this may seem superfluous at first, a proper understanding of genre will permit the thorough analysis of, for example, the character archetypes in use in the subgenre, and the possible applicability of said archetypes in potential real world discourses. As Philippa Gates (2006, 7) explains, "Genres are fictional worlds but they do not remain within the bounds of fiction; instead, their conventions cross over into critical and cultural discourse and can be seen as an alternative public sphere." Finally, in defining both generic features and the concepts of abnormality and normality, aspects of psychoanalytical reading of detective fiction will be employed in examining some of the ways that the character archetype of the detective is said to function, and, in addition, the effect that the historical background of the novels has had upon their conceptualization of (ab)normality will have to be also adequately considered.

### 2.1. Deviancy and disability in detective fiction

Deviancy and deviation I define largely as Gregoriou does: "Deviation is a term that means different things for different disciplines, . . . I take 'deviation' to refer to the difference between what we take

to be normal or acceptable and that which is not” (1). Furthermore, in order to avoid ambiguity and maintain consistency, the terms deviancy and deviation will be used synonymously in this thesis, as this is also what Gregoriou does in her study (*ibid.*). Therefore, deviancy studies refers to the analysis, study and contrasting of the abnormal with that which is considered normal: in the context of sociology, according to Gregoriou, “deviance refers to abnormality in behavior, and in the context of the genre at hand, it is manifested in criminality. It is in fact rather conventional to view criminals as deviant” (2). This is, however, not always the case and, as shall be brought up in the analysis section, more often than not the individuals exhibiting social deviancy are not criminals at all in the context of Carr’s novels: although the criminally deviant are also present, they form only a portion of the facets of deviation in Carr. Indeed, one can very easily make the sensible claim that, whether in reality or on the pages of detective fiction, most individuals deviating from the norms of society are not criminals at all. This sociological aspect of deviancy is one of the ways through which behavioral abnormality will be analyzed in this thesis.

It is also worth considering that whether something is considered deviant or abnormal behavior is heavily context based, as Gregoriou explains:

*Abnormals* (that is, criminals) are expected to conceptualise the world *abnormally* and, in real-life, criminals’ labelling as such may even contribute to their course of actions and behaviour. Readers tend to tolerate, for instance, the detective’s social abnormalities only because these are attached to individuals we take to be *normal*. Therefore, in discussing deviance, it is necessary to consider the social manifestations of the term. (25–26)

Effectively this tolerance of abnormality seems to be connected to the reader undergoing a process of moral evaluation upon learning of the supposedly abnormal character’s true nature, as according to Alan H. Goldman (2011, 267 and 270) the subgenre of detective fiction seeks to encourage its readers to participate in a process of readerly identification with characters ethically speaking both better and worse than the readers themselves. This identification and moral evaluation is also tied to the idea prevalent in the genre that the detective and criminal – both character types that the reader is invited to think like (268) – are opposites of one another with the criminal essentially becoming a malevolent

mirror image of the detective (Howe 2008, 35), both in the roles they take in the narrative and in how the characters are presented to the reader.<sup>1</sup> This mirroring of the two figures and positioning the reader in the roles of both detective and criminal is explained by Christine Evans (1994, 163–164) as a way “to play out and eventually expiate all antisocial, antinomian impulses, and [the reader] finishes the detective novel a better citizen.” Essentially, the reader is made to think like two abnormal figures, and engage in a moral evaluation, which will eventually result in the reader potentially becoming a better person, or more ‘normal’. This idea will be explored more thoroughly in the analysis section.

Another crucial aspect to consider in the question of abnormality and in finding a suitable definition for it is that abnormality, in the sense of difference from that which is considered normal, may take the form of a physical or mental disability. While this may seem largely unconnected to the sociological aspect of deviancy at first, it is worth noting that disability in fictional characters heavily influences, and sometimes outright defines, the types of roles that the disabled character generally plays in formulaic fiction such as detective fiction: Davis (1995, 41) claims outright that “more often than not villains tend to be physically abnormal”, and critics such as Hafferty and Foster (188) also note that “Although characters with physical impairments are no strangers to the pages of literary fiction, most often they have been cast in secondary roles and/or as villains . . . and therefore relegated to a certain invisibility.” This notion is further voiced by critics such as Michael Bérubé (2005, 569) who notes that “Western literature of the past two millennia has often participated in the Christian tradition of reading disability as an index of morality” and who also points out that “scholars in disability studies are right to point out that literary representations of people with disabilities often serve to mobilize pity or horror in a moral drama that has nothing to do with the actual experience of disability” (570). Similar notions have been put forward by Hafferty and Foster:

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault describes this reversed mirroring of the figures of criminal and detective as the clashing and struggle between the two minds of the criminal and the detective. Foucault saw literature which depicted such as a kind of glorification of crime, a means of making murder a fine art and the criminal a kind of artist of monstrosity and exceptionality. (1995, 68–69) This helps with the readerly moral evaluation described further on, as both the detective-figure and the criminal are made the ‘others’ of both the normative reader and the Watson-figure.

Taken as a whole, the analysis of depictions of physical impairment in the popular culture . . . reveal several dominant themes including how images of impairment have been linked with those of criminality, malevolence, monsters, tragedy, charity, and ridicule. These largely negative images reflect the broader social attitudes of pity, fear, ignorance, and embarrassment. (187)

Essentially, whether a character is perceivably disabled or not plays a significant part in determining both their role in the story and how they are characterized. Davis (10) even directly states that disabled people are defined solely through their disability when stereotyped by the nondisabled world: their disability becomes the defining factor of their character in the eyes of others, in a manner similar to other ways to categorize and stereotype different people such as ethnicity and sexual orientation (ibid.). Similarly, those who are able to perform the role of the nondisabled, or hide their disability from public view, are no longer considered disabled by the nondisabled world (ibid.). This idea of appearance defining how disabled people are labeled and stereotyped is further defined by Davis:

The question of appearance is the second major modality by which disability is constructed. The person with disabilities is visualized, brought into a field of vision, and seen as a disabled person. . . . The body of the disabled is seen as marked by the disability. [The disability] is seen by the 'normal' observer. . . . The power of the gaze to control, limit, and patrol the disabled person is brought to the fore. Accompanying the gaze are a welter of powerful emotional responses. These responses can include horror, pity, compassion, and avoidance. (12)

Indeed, it is worth pointing out that elements of the Gothic horror atmosphere evident in the Fell novels are sometimes maintained via the use of either physical or mental disability to produce horror when seen through the eyes of the focalizing characters, the Watson-figures, who are considered normal and constructed as such: they may respond to unexplained behavior brought on by disability with horror, for example. In *The Crooked Hinge*, the legless murderer, Patrick Gore, is seen by an eye witness without his prosthetic legs for a split second at the time of the murder, and the sighting is later described as a monster crawling about in the dark garden; in fact, Patrick later confesses that the victim was paralyzed in fear upon seeing him approach without legs. In *He Who Whispers*, the strange and unnerving behavior of Fay Seton, a murder suspect, is attributed to her supposed vampiric

nature until Doctor Fell offers a rational, psychological explanation for said behavior: her nymphomania. Conversely, Patrick is treated sympathetically prior to his reveal as the legless killer by the characters around him, while all notion of Fay being a monster is discarded the minute her innocence is assured. Both characters are seen through their disability and defined by it, but their subsequent characterization and treatment by other people is vastly different. Patrick initially hides his disability, passes for a normal person and is treated as such because he is not recognized as being the monster in the garden, whereas Fay cannot hide the effects of her disability and is considered abnormal by those around her.

Bérubé further reinforces this connection in the combined use of mental disability in particular and of the Gothic in fiction by stating that “literature has been fascinated by madness for some time, particularly in those historical periods in which the capacity for reason has been considered the measure of being human.” (571). This kind disposition towards mental illness and mental disability showcases the kinds of societal anxieties and attitudes that Lee Horsley (2010, 32) says could be found underneath the “cozy” surface of the whodunit subgenre, and which emerged even more strongly in detective fiction immediately following World War II as Horsley outright states (29).

Alexander N. Howe makes the further point in the development of the detective genre itself that from the end of the nineteenth century onwards – in mimicry of popular culture notions of Lombrosian thought about criminality being externally perceptible (Pittard 2011, 114) – criminals in detective fiction began to also represent the uncanny and monstrous, and the role of the classical detective began to shape into the role of fighting the monstrous, the uncanny and the unknown via science (Howe, 55–56). The detective became not just a force of reason, but one of reassurance and conformism as the previously unexplained and the mysterious could now be comfortably confronted and purged via rational explanation (36–37). In fact, according to Gill Plain, “Crime fiction in general, and detective fiction in particular, is about confronting and taming the monstrous. It is literature of containment, a narrative that ‘makes safe’” (2001, 3). Effectively, in an increasingly irrational

seeming world, the classical detective figure promised rational explanations for the seemingly irrational: Howe claims that where science and psychoanalysis in the real world failed to understand the mind of the individual, the fictional detective faced no such obstacle, as the detective could complete gaps in contemporary scientific knowledge and explain everything (29). As Evans explains on realist texts, such as detective fiction:

Realism is . . . essentially plagiarist: it owes its very intelligibility to the fact that it recapitulates accepted cultural, historical and psychological givens. It offers the comfort of established world views rather than . . . putting these into question and thus menacing the conceptual habits of the receiver. (160)

While this does seem to make typical detective fiction a conservative defence of the status quo, as Gregoriou (45–46) and Howe (16–17 and 22) have noted, the need for detective fiction to explain real life criminality and abnormality and the associated need for detective fiction to be a realistic genre of fiction also lead to its mimicry of real society in its characters. In spite of the genre, generally speaking, mainly depicting characters belonging to the middle and upper classes of society, Carr being no exception in this regard as Joshi states (91), George Grella has noted that this depicted exclusive society, “Though basically homogeneous, . . . does contain variety. Its members, though roughly equal in social standing, are not of the same class, family background, or profession. Within a limited range they comprise an English microcosm” (39). The claim can very easily be made that in this seemingly realist microcosmic representation of English society, normality and abnormality must also thus be somehow represented. This idea about detective fiction comprising a microcosm of English society – combined with Gregoriou’s notion of narratives as “codings of experience and constructions of reality” (4), and the point she raises about realist narratives being expected by their audiences to produce a discourse about a world that they recognize (4–5) – leads to the inevitable conclusion that detective fiction attempts to provide the reader with explanations about an ever-changing world, and the ideas about normality and abnormality changing with it, while still remaining true to its status quo defending origins. Evans sees all works of popular culture in the light of being

produced by society to fulfill particular needs for their own audiences, and in being useful tools for future analysts to identify and understand issues and needs in the society that produced them (163), whereas Grella notes that the format of detective fiction in particular often follows and conforms to the prejudices of the society it depicts (42), which in this case is that of the English upper classes and their concerns about normality and abnormality.

This development in detective fiction, especially evident in post-World War II detective fiction, reflecting the need of society to explain criminal and abnormal behavior, is further detailed by Frederick Whiting (2005) in his article:

As a discourse of normative individual development, popularized Freudian explanations shed ostensibly apolitical light on social problems of all stripes, most notably in connection with criminal deviance. Likewise, detective fiction, as a narrative of legal transgression cum popular entertainment, came to provide not only criminal containment, but also psychological explanations of criminal behaviour. Thus, by mid-century an interpenetration of these narratives was in progress. Psychoanalysis was invoked across a spectrum of institutional and, more significantly, popular discourses to investigate the kind of criminal deviance that had long been a staple element of detective fiction. For its part detective fiction during the period increasingly incorporated – even if in some cases to dismiss – psychoanalysis into its mechanics and thematics. What emerged from this interanimating conversation was both a revision of popular conceptions of criminal motivation and a redrawing of what were taken to be the boundaries of normal human identity. (149–150)

Where this development eventually lead to the formulation of serial killer narratives, owing to their shared Gothic roots, these themes of questioning the boundaries of normality and identity are evident also in the whodunit stories Carr wrote in the 1940s especially. Whiting also notes that detective fiction in this period, within the broader cultural context, “effectively rescripted the inquiry from a narrowly criminal investigation into an examination of the boundaries of the human” (151), where the true nature of the criminal became more important than who they actually were.

In order to make this unmasking of peoples’ true nature possible in crime narratives, the psychological and cultural concept of identity had to be borrowed for use in crime narratives. The concept of identity, then, can be roughly divided into three distinct categorizations as some critics such as Chris Barker (2008, 215) have done. The first category according to Barker is subjectivity,

which he defines as “the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become a person; that is, how we are constituted as subjects (biologically and culturally) and how we experience ourselves (including that which is indescribable)” (ibid.). While there is some overlap, subjectivity should not be confused with self-identity which consists of “the verbal conceptions we hold about ourselves and our emotional identification with those self-descriptions” (ibid.), which, again, must be distinguished from social identity which can be defined as “the expectations and opinions that others have of us” (ibid.). These aspects, especially that of social identity, are crucial in defining what can be considered the boundaries of normal human identity or normality in general, as it is generally society that defines individuals as normal or abnormal. A possible mismatch and clash between self-identity and social identity, a person whose conception of self is at odds with how the society around them perceives them and expects them to behave, may lead to a person being labeled abnormal.

If what is to be considered deviant or abnormal in the characters of detective fiction is then to be studied and analyzed further, its antithesis, normality, must also be somehow adequately defined beyond the expectations society places upon individuals. In his book, Davis notes that, akin to other similar concepts used in defining individuals, bodily normality and disability can only be defined in relation to one another:

Disability is not an object – a woman with a cane – but a social process that intimately involves everyone who has a body and lives in the world of the senses. Just as the conceptualization of race, class and gender shapes the lives of those who are not black, poor or female, so the concept of disability regulates the bodies of those who are ‘normal.’ In fact, the very concept of normalcy by which most people (by definition) shape their existence is in fact tied inexorably to the concept of disability, or rather, the concept of disability is a function of a concept of normalcy. Normalcy and disability are part of the same system. (2)

Davis also outlines that the structures present in fiction tend to be normative, emphasizing “the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her” (41). The normativity of the main characters encourages reader identification with them, and it is also in the main characters of the Carr novels wherein the definition of normality that Carr has employed, and that which will be used for the purposes of analysis, can be located. The idea that



something, be it the body, the mind or the mode of behavior of a character, is deviant or otherwise abnormal is achieved through a contrast with that which is considered to exhibit normality. The main character – in the case of the Fell novels the focalizing Watson-figure – generally speaking represents normality in all of the three senses so far outlined, whereas other, sometimes villainous, characters may represent abnormality, whether outright social deviance or disability. The specific definition and characteristics of normativity at play in Carr will be outlined when the Watson-figures are discussed further in the analysis section, while the specific role and nature of the Watson-figure itself will be outlined in the section about the generic features of detective fiction. Gregoriou, meanwhile, outlines this process of contrasting abnormality with normality further:

In fact, one important reason that has underlined recent studies in abnormal behaviour was the idea that abnormality can assist in the understanding of normal behaviour and processes that govern it. ‘Potentially, at least, the study of the abnormal can test and improve our concept of normality’ (Cole, 1970: 15). (91)

This concept of understanding normal behavior through abnormal behavior also extends to the body and disability, because as Davis further outlines, “We live in a world of norms. . . . To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of norm, the normal body” (23), which, when combined with the readerly identification discussed earlier, makes the question of normality and abnormality a binary one. There can be no definition of either concept without a contrasting other: society compares and contrasts all people and, similarly, this happens in detective fiction where both the reader, who has been encouraged to identify with the normative Watson-figure, and the characters themselves compare and contrast the normal with the abnormal. When Davis (2) states that “When one speaks of disability, one always associates it with a story, places it in a narrative”, and Bérubé speaks about the need for disability to always have a story and representation when present in fiction regardless of the nature of the disability (570), the need to explain the causes of disability becomes apparent: when disability is explained, for example as a result of an accident or a congenital medical condition, the

normativity of the nondisabled is further established for they have not undergone the same that the disabled have.

The two main ways that disability has been embedded into narrative according to disability studies, and as identified by Hafferty and Foster, are disability-in-dialogue and disability-in-action (190–191). Disability-in-dialogue, as the name of the term suggests, is the narration of disability through the comments and observations of the nondisabled on disability and its effects on the disabled (190). According to Hafferty and Foster “these ‘normal’ characters do little more than verbally describe the action at hand (apparently for the reader’s benefit). Rarely do they criticize, speculate on, or otherwise express feelings about the major character’s impairment or the implications of that impairment” (ibid.), resulting in a very tone neutral depiction of disability in narrative. Disability-in-action, on the other hand, is the placing of disability in narrative in the form of a sequence of actions: concretely showing the effects that disability may have on the actions, such as mobility, of the disabled. In practical effect, “the audience is allowed to ‘see’ rather than ‘hear about’ the impairment in question” (191), giving additional depth and prominence to the actual experience of disability than its counterpart allows.

The exception to this rule of needing to explain disability in narrative seems to be characters who are not visibly hampered or impaired by their disability, so that they pass for the nondisabled, or those characters who have been compensated for their disability in some way so that the practical effects of their disability are not as debilitating as they otherwise could be expected to be. In detective fiction, this seems to be the case mainly with the figure of the detective, who, as was noted in the introductory chapter, is differentiated and set apart from both the normative Watson-figure and the average reader by both their possible disability and their considerable logical and analytical prowess. In fact, as Hafferty and Foster explain, this strategy of differentiation, and at the same time of mitigation of the effects of the differentiating disability, is fairly common in the genre:

Regardless of the narrative devices used to inform the reader of disability (dialogue versus action) or of the time period in which the novel was written (1930s versus 1980s), most creators of detectives with physical impairments have found it either desirable or necessary to endow their heroes with compensating or otherwise counterbalancing characteristics. In this way, the character's 'shortcomings' are blunted – both by rendering the impairment socially or personally inconsequential for the character and by 'sparing' the reader the full and negative measure of the impairment. . . . A second strategy is to endow the character with compensating (usually physical or mentally based) skills, traits, or powers. For example, . . . Those with impairments of the lower limbs consequently possess superhuman upper body strength . . . Individuals 'imprisoned' by their impairment 'enjoy' remarkable analytical prowess. In many instances, these compensating characteristics are not merely coincidental attributes but are represented as causally related to the 'defect' in question. (192)

In the case of Doctor Fell, the origin of his disability is never established, and his mobility impairment never hinders his ability to solve crimes. Indeed, in some cases, such as *The Crooked Hinge*, he never even visits the exact crime scene, instead having the necessary details conferred to him by either the police or the Watson-figure: his disability, while present in the narratives as both disability-in-dialogue and -action, has been compensated for by a remarkable analytical and logical ability. These remedial abilities of reason are, according to Howe, at the heart of the classical detective's worldview: that "the world is a transparent chain of causality. Causes seamlessly produce effects, and, because of the relentlessness of this teleology, it is likewise possible to use this reason in reverse, from effects to causes" (12), effectively allowing the detective both to solve crimes and, despite his own possible abnormality, unmask the true nature of others regardless of the form this nature may manifest in, whether deviancy or disability.

This aspect also reinforces the aforementioned contrasting of normality and abnormality in society, as the detective, as an authoritative figure, lends credence to the diagnoses they provide: as Howe explains, "As trusted representative of the ruling order, or the disciplinary apparatus, the detective reduces individuals to knowable types based upon details that might be charted, or mapped, and thus grasped hold of by knowledge" (18). Indeed, following Lacanian thought, Howe claims that in detective fiction the relationship of science and society is kept unproblematic, and, accordingly, characters behave according to deducible patterns (22), permitting for a scientific explanation of abnormal behavior and abnormality, for example, in the confines of the genre of the detective fiction.

## 2.2. Genre studies and the generic features of detective fiction

Genre studies as a field can loosely be defined as the academic study of texts through their structural and thematic elements, and the patterns that generally form individual genres: how texts within a genre or subgenre are understood, interpreted and defined by the formulaic patterns the texts exhibit features of. My specific reasoning for using genre studies as a part of the theoretical framework to support my argument is that thereby I can best understand the features which form the subgenre of the fair-play whodunit, and the ways that the reader's expectations of the subgenre influence their understanding of whodunit texts. Indeed, according to John Frow (2005, 104) and Cawelti (9), the concept of genre is crucial in defining a set of expectations readers have and it guides their engagement with texts. Particularly the reader's past experience with any particular genre is essential in defining the kind of genre expectations the reader will have according to Cawelti (*ibid.*), which is another crucial aspect of my argument: readers engage with texts based on their prior familiarity with genres.

The terms genre and subgenre I define as Frow does in his introductory book to genre studies (67): “*genre* or kind, a more specific organization of texts with thematic, rhetorical and formal dimensions; and *sub-genre*, the further specification of genre by a particular thematic content”. Thus, generic texts are not only defined and categorized into said genres by their setting, characters or themes, but also by, for example, the authorial intent and the rhetoric used to convey said intent, in addition to the style of the language or the layout of the text itself. Indeed, the concepts of authorial intent and rhetoric can be considered somewhat problematic in Carr, as Joshi outlines about the characters Carr writes of:

If there is any systematic and unchanging belief in Carr's philosophical outlook, it is his political conservatism. Many of the sympathetic characters in his work are self-confessed reactionaries, and even his detectives take occasion to lash out at socialism and liberalism. . . . he cannot portray political (or any other) views opposed to his without making them grotesquely ridiculous. Carr is very anxious throughout his work that the reader like and

approve of just those characters he likes and approves of, and hate those he hates. It was beyond his powers to portray sympathetically a figure whose beliefs he opposes. (88–89)

This aspect of authorial intent colors Carr's writing, and also aligns him with the idea of a conservative defence of the status quo inherent in the genre of fair-play whodunit detective fiction, as discussed in the previous subchapter. While this does, in many respects, position his overall rhetoric as identifiably conservative, Joshi does fail to make note of the ways Carr uses not only the genre conventions of the fair-play whodunit but also to some extent those of the Gothic horror story, in making sympathetic and understandable the kinds of characters that the typical conservative detective novel normally would not: those typically constructed as abnormal in some capacity. I will return to this rhetoric later in the analysis chapters.

The distinction has to be made, however, that texts do not strictly only 'belong' to any one particular genre; instead, each individual text may exhibit features of a number of different genres and subgenres. The way any particular text is read is influenced by which of these genres a reader recognizes as they read the text. As Frow explains, "Thus 'genre is not, as is commonly thought, a class but, rather, a classifying statement'" (Rosmarin 1985, quoted in Frow, 102). Frow elaborates on this further when he discusses the relationship between text and reader:

Genre is neither a property of (and located 'in') texts, nor a projection of (and located 'in') readers; it exists as a part of the relationship between texts and readers, and it has a systematic existence. It is a shared convention with a social force. The imputations or guesses we make about the appropriate and relevant conventions to apply in a particular case will structure our reading, guiding the course it will take, our expectations of what it will encounter. (102–103)

From this we can conclude that the identification of genre of a text is crucial if a reader is to form an understanding of any text, and thereby have expectations of what will follow as the text is read further. To this end a set of generic cues is required that may guide the reader towards the identification of a text's generic features. Frow identifies these internal or generic cues as a matter of authorial intention (109), positing that "we cannot conclude . . . that interpreters have the licence to read whatever generic form they please into a text" (ibid.). However, Frow concludes immediately thereafter that "neither

authors nor readers act as autonomous agents in relation to the structure of genre, since these genres are the shared property of a community” (ibid.). Thus, both authors and readers are put in roughly equal positions as far as the ‘limits’ of any particular genre of text are concerned.

Furthermore, Frow argues that these aforementioned generic cues take the form of metacommunication between the author and reader via the text (104). Elaborating, he states that where many cues are internal to the text, some are external to the body of the text and in the margins (104), for example in the form of a footnote. The latter can be seen most explicitly in *The Crooked Hinge* in chapter 2 (CH, 21), wherein a footnote from the author assures the reader that the evidence about to be presented by Kennet Murray is genuine. Carr specifically states there that this clarification is made in order to make the mystery easier, and to remove a red herring which would distract the reader too much from what he felt were the crucial pieces of information which could only be attained by trusting Murray explicitly. Footnotes of this kind were fairly frequent in Carr's novels (Joshi, 104–105). This kind of direct communication to the reader, intended to help in the puzzle-solving aspect, also guides the reader's reactions to the characters, as this particular footnote attempts to ensure the reader's explicit trust in Murray and thereby also assure the reader of his honest and good nature. Critic Malcah Effron identifies Carr's use of the footnote as a trope of postmodernism and a staple among some mystery writers, Carr being one of them, and as such a generic feature which breaks the boundaries of the page and the narrative (2010, 1999). Effron concludes that Golden Age authors who used footnotes did so in order to provide extratextual authority for any possible clues they presented in their stories, to confirm the ostensible realism of the subgenre, and to assure the reader that the generic convention of fair-play was being observed (200–203). In ways such as these, though rarely as blatantly metafictional as a footnote addressing the audience directly, authors guide readers towards the identification of genres and their generic features.

As further proof of an equalization of both authors and readers, at least when it comes to such a formulaic genre as fair-play detective fiction, several guidelines have been offered on how to

construct and present a ‘proper’ fair-play mystery to the reader. The aforementioned *Knox’s Decalogue* used in this thesis is one such set of guidelines (see Appendix). The *Decalogue* is a list of ten general criteria which writers of fair-play mystery should abide in order to maintain the central tenet of the subgenre; the fact that the reader must be able to solve the mysteries presented. Although not all authors followed the guidelines, many aspects from them are still visible in their works. Speaking of formulaic stories, which includes crime fiction, Cawelti (19) notes that, “Like such games as football or baseball, formula stories are individual versions of a general pattern defined by a set of rules.” Thus, while not all of the works generally considered to be fair-play follow the ‘rules’ as set out by Knox, the reader’s expectations of fair-play and the author’s characters might still be influenced by these guidelines, even if this is not consciously recognized on the part of the reader. The *Decalogue* and the specific ways it has influenced the various characters in Carr will be discussed further in the analysis section.

As Stephen Knight (2004, 86) points out, “The alleged ‘golden age’ is no more than another competing sub-genre with its own audience and patterns”, and thus, as a recognizable subgenre, I argue, it has its own rhetorical purpose. While this rhetorical purpose in the case of Carr has been stated as not existing by Joshi (139), beyond the challenge issued to the reader by the author to solve the mysteries, I will seek to prove that a further rhetorical purpose can be formulated in analysing how Carr constructs and contrasts normality and abnormality. Cawelti (126) defines Carr’s purpose in writing detective fiction as follows:

The kind of art exemplified by Agatha Christie is also evident in the “challenge to the reader” stories of writers like John Dickson Carr . . . Here the central focus is on complication and ingenuity in constructing the crime in the first place and in the devious stratagems involved in presenting the inquiry in such a way that the reader is deeply engrossed in trying to figure out the mystery.

This notion of the author challenging the reader is backed by Carr’s own article from *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* which Joshi quotes. Within this same passage Carr indicates as well that he is following some kind of guidelines for writing fair-play mystery by his use of the words ‘legitimate

trick’: “‘It is a hoodwinking contest, a duel between author and reader. ‘I dare you,’ says the reader, ‘to produce a solution which I can’t anticipate.’ ‘Right!’ says the author, chuckling over the consciousness of some new and legitimate dirty trick concealed up his sleeve.’” (Carr quoted in Joshi, 100–101).

While Carr’s own admission of writing fair-play whodunit as form of contest between author and reader does perhaps betray a certain lack of Carr’s in seeing crime fiction literature as nothing more than a game, it does not explain why Carr would choose certain thematic elements time and time again over the course of his career in ways that are impossible to miss; some of these kinds of thematic elements are, for example, the ever present pervasiveness of human evil (Joshi, 115), the notion that some people are condemnable amoral, evil and deviant, and the veiling of the crime by making it look like the work of a supernatural entity (Joshi, 113), with Joshi outright stating that “The suggested supernatural always . . . comes out to possess a perfectly rational explanation in Carr’s work” (114). Finally, once the supernatural is exposed for the agency of an evil person, Carr often has his characters express horror and shock at the depths that human beings can sink to (Joshi, 116), serving to highlight the evil and deviant nature of the criminal. These kinds of overt themes in his novels suggest an additional rhetorical purpose to Carr’s writing beyond that of merely engaging readers in a contest.

Writing about the typical features of Carr’s works, Joe R. Christopher identifies Carr’s allusions to the supernatural, which are then discovered to be the work of human agency, as belonging to the Gothic tradition of Ann Radcliffe (2008, 127). While Christopher does maintain that the puzzle-element held a central position in Carr’s writing, he notes the consistent use of the explained supernatural as worthy of deeper analysis as he does with Carr’s *The Burning Court* from 1937 (ibid.). Carr himself comments on his own writing in an article that Christopher quotes, and in the article Carr states that, “‘a formula of mine [is] that every apparently supernatural event should be explained, and yet . . . at the end a real enigma of the supernatural should remain.’” (Carr quoted in Christopher,



132). Michael Holquist sees the use of the supernatural as atypical of the subgenre, and notes that, “these [supernatural] elements are foreign to the world of the detective story – they belong to other worlds of sheer convention, . . . the ghost story and science fiction. There is an important point to be learned about conventions here. They do not exist in isolation; . . . Conventions must be *familiar*” (1971, 142). Carr’s typical writing then can be characterized as detective fiction with Gothic elements, with the generic features of the subgenre of the detective story being the ones which would have mostly created the framework under which the primary material would have been written.

As its own distinctive subgenre of detective fiction, the fair-play whodunit has to be defined somehow further than simple reader participation in a mystery solving contest. Although the term he uses is the ‘clue-puzzle’, Knight offers the following definition of the subgenre:

It is possible to shape a list of features that make the clue-puzzle an identifiable sub-genre of crime fiction. . . . The crime will be murder . . . This murder will take place in an enclosed setting . . . The social setting is also exclusive. . . . The victim has some wealth and authority . . . The detective technique, . . . always emphasises rationality. . . . Central to the clue-puzzle is the idea that you the reader can in fact solve this ahead of the detective . . . ; you can now actually stand in for the detective. (87–88)

This formulaic definition offered by Knight is very similar to how the subgenre has been characterized by critics such as Cawelti, under the name Poe’s pattern of action (81–82). Carr’s novels largely follow Poe’s pattern of action as outlined by Cawelti (ibid.): the characters and setting are introduced; the victim, the criminal, the focalizer, and all of the other principle characters are brought together; a crime occurs; the detective is introduced to the case, and he then follows a logical trail of clues all the way to the solution. As a piece of formulaic literature, the typical reader of fair-play detective fiction will have anticipated this, and will engage themselves with the rational puzzle-solving the author has anticipated of them (Cawelti, 107). Poe’s pattern of action summarizes the narrative structure of the typical fair-play whodunit succinctly, and allows the reader – right from the first page of the novel – to begin clue gathering and brain storming in preparation for the up-coming mysteries. However, it also makes readers aware of any breach in the conventions of the genre and, therefore, where typical

genre convention is violated, the reader, who has been invited to, as Howe (28) puts it, “read like the detective”, will take note of these generic deviations and be invited to analyze them as they would the actual mystery itself.

In discussing the genre and reader expectations, its character archetypes and the roles they play must also be examined and defined, because, as Gregoriou has put forward, readerly expectations extend to the schemata of characters as well (31). The most noteworthy archetypes and roles of the genre include those of the detective, the Watson, the criminal, and the victim; these are the roles that are virtually always present in some form in the classical detective story. Where the genre can thus, justifiably, be said to be dealing to a certain extent with stock characters (Grella, 30–31), it is curious to notice as Howe does that the subgenre itself, operating on very rigid conventions and rules, forces characterization to be based upon a “logical algebra”: where a certain type of character always operates in a certain, predictable way (15–16), and where, therefore, the behavior of all characters is reduced to a recognizable pattern which the genre seeks to explain – whether this behavior is criminally deviant or otherwise abnormal – to the supposed normative audience. Howe even goes as far as to say that, “To fall outside of the greater system of registration and encoding is to fall into the realm of the criminal. The individual’s best hope is to “conform to a stereotype”: in this way, one will never be a victim or a criminal” (21). Indeed, characters in the genre who attempt to defy such stereotyping are often found in the categories of victims and criminals, as shall become evident in the analysis chapters.

The archetype of the detective, the eponymous hero of the subgenre, is one which is perhaps the most governed by the so-called rules and limitations of the generic formula. The Knox rules #6, #7 and #8 all define what the detective can and cannot do in fair-play whodunit, by disallowing the detective archetype from being the criminal themselves and also by regulating the nature of the detective’s powers of reasoning (see Appendix). In keeping with the comforting and explaining role of the detective discussed previously, the detective’s analytical prowess must be presented in full for

the reader's amazement; this explains why things such as an "unaccountable intuition" (ibid.) are deemed unacceptable in the conventions of the genre. Doctor Fell is an interesting take on this archetype for he is keenly aware not only of the generic features of the genre he inhabits, but also of the fact that he himself is a fictional figure inside a detective story. Horsley describes Fell's characteristic metafictional quality as noteworthy, bringing attention to the fact that, despite its rigidly formulaic nature, the subgenre still allowed for innovation within its boundaries: "This generic knowingness had an energizing and often transformative effect. The challenge was to vary the conventions in ways that were unexpected" (31). An example of this metafictional quality can be found in *The Crooked Hinge* when, after he is informed of the murder, Fell states the following:

"I am worried about this case, because all the rules have been violated. All rules have been violated because the wrong man had been chosen for a victim. If only Murray had been murdered! (I speak academically you understand.)" . . . "In any well-constituted plot he would've been murdered." (*CH*, 58–59)

This rant of Fell's indicates that he is aware of the fact that there are rules that can be violated in the first place, thus suggesting that some form of guidelines for fair-play writing, such as Knox's, are used by Carr. Indeed, according to Joshi (103), the vast majority of Carr's works follow the notion of fair-play strictly, even though this particular passage indicates said conventions to have been somehow violated.

As was discussed earlier in the previous subchapter, the point-of-view character of classical whodunit detective stories is often the so-called Watson-figure, as Gregoriou notes by stating that "it is most usually the . . . 'commentator' (Dr Watson type) who focalizes events" (43), similar claims have been made much earlier in the critical tradition of the genre as Cawelti states much the same (83), and the Knox rules, written originally in 1929, expressly identify this figure by the name Watson (see Appendix). The Watson, so called because of the archetypal chronicler of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, is characterized not only through their supposedly relatable normativity, as was previously outlined, but also by the role they play in detective fiction. Rule #9 of Knox's Decalogue

directly defines the very nature of the typical Watson, namely that they must not conceal any of their thoughts from the reader, and that their intelligence must be slightly below that of the average reader (see Appendix). Tying into this limiting of intelligence, according to Howe, “The story must be documented by the devotee of the detective. This character’s amazed admiration for the work of the ingenious sleuth represents the position of the reader and, more generally, the status quo” (15), which, when combined with the role of the previously defined detective figure, leads us back to the predominantly conformist and normative attitudes of the genre: as mentioned in the previous subchapter, the genre attempts to make safe that which the reader would find disquieting and unsettling through the reader’s identification with the normative Watson and the explaining, purging, role of the detective.

Unlike the detective and the Watson, the generic role of the criminal or villain is one that, in accordance with the conventions of the fair-play whodunit genre, needs to blend in and appear innocent, which means that they are not immediately identifiable for who they truly are. In fact, rule #1 states that the criminal must be present as a character from early on in the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow (see Appendix). Grella even notes that “Even a casual reader of detective fiction will recognize . . . [that] the typical villain is not a [career] criminal, but an ordinary, and superficially acceptable citizen, ‘a person like you and me,’ which . . . would imply condemnation rather than exculpation of the society” (33); therefore, the criminal must mask their true nature within the rules of the genre. In concert with this idea of blending in the largely upper-class world of the classical whodunit, the lower classes are excluded from the role of the criminal, as Plain explains:

Crime fiction thrives on the unexpected and as a result creates a world in which the usual suspects must for once be exonerated. Irrespective of the contempt which the butler may face as one of the lower classes, the fact remains that within the conventions of the genre he cannot be the criminal. The illegitimacy of his class position ironically guarantees his unimpeachability in the bourgeois world of classical crime fiction, and the same curious inversion applies to a whole range of social and sexual transgressions. (11–12)

It must be noted, as Joshi does (92), that Carr also held onto this notion inherent in the genre whereby servants were always excluded from suspicion, and that the criminal had to belong, at least superficially, to the upper- and middle-class society that was brought under scrutiny following a murder. When the criminal attempts to blend into society, both Howe (22–23) and Gregoriou (45–46) outline the social role of the criminal in detective fiction as being that of a social confuser, in stark opposition to the role of the detective as the restorer of the status quo: where the detective untangles and explains mystery and proves innocence, the criminal creates the mystery and shifts blame on characters who, true to form, turn out to be innocent in the end. Similarly to the archetype of the victim, described below, the criminal according to Grella must turn out to be somehow socially undesirable; however, he claims this undesirability need not be to the same extent as that of the victim, because the criminal – as the formula dictates – must be more capable of masking their true self than the victim is (43). In connection with this is the notion that sometimes, when the victim has been a truly evil person, the criminal may commit suicide or even be allowed to escape provided they, as Grella describes, quit their society and never return (44); in fact, as Grella further states, “Once the murderer leaves, the world of the novel begins to approach its former peacefulness” (*ibid.*). Gates finds this particular aspect of the criminal being forced out of the society a central tenet of the subgenre, though she describes it in terms of “identifying evil” and the “elimination” of the criminal figure (66).

The generic role of the victim in classical detective fiction is a rather curious one. Where most critics who write about the victims of detective fiction, including Grella and Plain, only denote victim as someone who is actually murdered, I will include characters whose murder is attempted, even if ultimately unsuccessfully, under my definition of the archetype of victim. This distinction – between victims who are murdered and those whose life is somehow saved from murder – is important because of the way the genre usually handles victims: as Grella states that only unlikeable characters are made to suffer permanently in the genre, “pains are taken to make the victim worthy of his fate: he must be

an exceptionally murderable man” (41). Indeed, Grella goes so far as to claim that a typical example of the genre usually “features two expulsions of ‘bad’ or socially unfit characters: the victim and the murderer” (ibid.). As I shall strive to prove in the analysis chapters, this kind of characterization does not seem to hold true even for the victims who are successfully murdered in the primary material. Of these unlikeable, dead victims, Grella explains:

The victim may be guilty of exploiting the ritual of his society, posing as a gentleman, but hiding a dark, unacceptable secret. . . . The victim in Carr’s *The Crooked Hinge* is a false claimant to a considerable country estate, neither a gentleman or a true squire. . . . On the rare occasion that a young woman is murdered, she is always revealed a secret sinner under a respectable facade, like the murdered adulteress in Carr’s *The Sleeping Sphinx*. . . . Virtually all victims, then, suffer their violent expulsion because of some breach of the unwritten social or ethical code of the thriller of manners. . . . Violations of accepted morality, particularly adultery, are capital crimes (42)

This description of hiding one’s true nature also coincides with the criminal doing much the same. The chief difference, it has to be noted, is in how sympathetically the victim is treated in contrast to the criminal, as both figures seek to blend into society before their natures are exposed as a result of the detective’s investigation. Of the aforementioned two victims, the false claimant in *The Crooked Hinge*, going by the name of John Farnleigh, is ultimately revealed to have suffered from amnesia, and is thus not considered completely responsible for his past criminally deviant actions, although the question of sympathy is left somewhat unclear by the narrative. Whereas the adulteress in *The Sleeping Sphinx*, Margot Marsh, is explained to have been a sufferer of sexual hysteria and, unlike the example of Farnleigh, not completely in control of herself; she is subsequently treated far more sympathetically than the criminal who killed her, when her true nature is diagnosed by Fell near the end of the novel.

Finally, a major generic feature in evidence in most fair-play detective stories of the Golden Age that needs to be mentioned is the detective’s summation found near the conclusion of the narrative. In the summation, the detective recounts the various mysteries encountered within the story and provides rational explanations for each one. Thomas M. Leitch explains the subgenre of the fair-

play whodunit as “the most resolutely end-oriented of narrative modes” (1983, 475), and the summation, with its single correct solution offered by the infallible detective figure, as the comforting resolution and climax to the archetypal detective story (ibid.). In the primary material, the summation is primarily also used by Doctor Fell to discuss and diagnose the various abnormal characters, offering psychological explanations where necessary or condemnation for the criminally deviant.

### 3. Comparing the normal with the abnormal

This chapter will focus on using the previously established theoretical framework to analyse some of the principle characters in the four novels in terms of either their normality – as is the case with the Watson-figures – or abnormality. In terms of the generic roles they play, most of the characters exhibiting abnormality in the primary material whether it is disability or deviance, with the notable exception of Doctor Fell, belong either in the archetypes of victim or criminal as earlier defined. The characters in each novel will be discussed in the chronological order of publication of the novels themselves. In addition, the characters will be compared and contrasted where appropriate with other characters, as it is through these clashes of social identity with both subjectivity and self-identity that give rise to most of the notions of abnormality in the primary material.

Furthermore, in the following section I will strive to show that the novels in their own way participated in the discourse regarding human abnormality in the English society during the time periods which the novels were published in. Throughout the novels a certain sense that normality and abnormality can be defined in comparison with one another is clearly evident, and that the reassuring figure of the detective will always arrive to reassert the status quo and restore society back to normal after it has been witness to abnormality. These factors are especially strongly evident in the two Fell novels published immediately after World War II, *He Who Whispers* and *The Sleeping Sphinx*. However, these notions and anxieties that the detective-figure came to purge away with scientific explanation were present even before and remained well after, as will be shown by the other two

novels analyzed, *The Crooked Hinge* and *The House at Satan's Elbow*, published in the 1930s and 1960s respectively.

### 3.1. Normative characters – the relatable averageness of the Watsons

While, by default, it may be safely assumed that most characters in the Fell series are considered normal by the depicted society, it is the focalizing Watson-figures that are of the most interest in terms of analysis in this section. This is largely because, as dictated by the rules of fair-play, we have uninhibited access to the Watson's perspective, opinions and observations, and, indeed, most of the scenes narrated are done with the Watson-figure's perspective overlaid and coloring the actual factual retelling of events. This is not merely limited to observations of, for example, Fell's disability in the form of disability-in-dialogue, but also possible feelings and emotions the Watson-figures express over the other forms of abnormality present in the characters of the narratives. When speaking of the Watson-figures of the Fell-series, Joshi had this comment to make of them:

. . . but aside from being the eyes through which the reader sees virtually all the action, they are not significant in themselves. Although they blunder into the middle of murder cases, Carr carefully contrives it that they not only never come under suspicion but could never do so because they have manifestly sound alibis. This is why they can tag along so insouciantly with Fell, Hadley, and others and learn all about the progress of the investigation. (29–30)

What Joshi in his analysis here fails to consider is that, in their normativity, the Watson-figures are supposed to be both trustworthy and relatable, if an idea about human normality through comparison and contrasting with the abnormality they encounter is to be formed. This reader-relatability is constructed, as outlined in the theory section, through the fact that they conform to the norms of the depicted upper-class and middle-class society of England. The Watson-figures in the primary material are, ultimately, a representation of the average person from this exclusive society; unlike the criminals and some of the victims, they do not have to attempt to pass as normal or blend in since they fit in right from the start. The fact that they represent the average of this society then allows for them to act as the baseline for comparison with the abnormal.



In addition, their averageness and normality colors their narration and observations of any abnormality they encounter; the Watson-figures in the primary material are often unable to relate to disability or deviance, since they have no personal experience of either, and so describe it at times in terms of emotion. Usually this translates to narration where, when facing someone abnormal or otherwise something inexplicable to them, they narrate the encounter via their immediate emotional responses, such as pity, fear or confusion. In this way they mimic the anxieties of the depicted society, or those of the readership at the time of publication, about abnormality; these anxieties being most perceptible in the Watson-figures of the novels chosen as primary material, but certainly present to an extent in the other novels of the Fell-series.

All four of the Watson-figures of the primary material – in chronological order: Brian Page, Miles Hammond, Donald Holden, and Garrett Andersson – share very similar characteristics. They are all wealthy, usually upper-middle class; they are all men, middle-aged, and they are also generally speaking walking WASP<sup>2</sup> stereotypes. Page and Andersson are both decidedly middle-class, but financially well-off, while Hammond and Holden are both middle-class men who, as their stories begin, have very recently been elevated to the upper-class; in both cases via a sudden and sizeable inheritance, in Holden's case including a baronetcy.

Additionally, the Watsons themselves also reflect the time period in which their stories were written: both Hammond and Holden served in the Second World War, reflecting the experiences of around three and a half million British men who served in the war. Hammond was incapacitated in the war by diesel-oil-poisoning, and he was forced to lie in a hospital bed, feeling trapped, for eighteen months. Holden, who survived the war unscathed, remarks bitterly at his former superior officer that the only reason he came into the title he inherited was because his two older brothers died in the war. It is also notable that both Watsons, in their own ways, take a moment at the beginning of their

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<sup>2</sup> White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. In other words, the ruling elite of white people in the United States in the decades the novels were published; this is the group that Carr, as an American, also represented. The term is usually used by people not belonging to the group.

narratives to describe the end of the war, and the effect the arrival of peace had on the people of the immediate post-war London. Passages like the following serve to connect the Watsons to the possible experiences of the typical male reader at the time of publication by describing the immediate emotional responses of both the Watson and the average person that the war and the return of peace brought with it. In *He Who Whispers* the Watson expressly compares his own emotional response to those of others and feels a kind of kindred apathy:

Then, gasping out to the end like a *gauleiter* swallowing poison, the war is over. You come out of hospital – a little shakily, your discharge papers in your pocket – into a London still pinched by shortages; a London of long queues, erratic buses, dry pubs; a London where they turn on the street-lights, and immediately turn them off again to save fuel; but a place free at last from the intolerable weight of threats.

People didn't celebrate that victory hysterically, as for some reason or other the newspapers liked to make out. What the news-reels showed was only a bubble on the huge surface of the town. Like himself, Miles Hammond thought, most people were apathetic because they could not think of it as real. (*HWW*, 2; italics original)

The Watson-figures are also fairly similar in temperament, fiercely protective and jealous of any potential rivals for the affections of their potential love interests, which affects their perceptions of both said rivals and the love interests. This jealous temperament plays into their emotional responses and narration when either of the aforementioned people are the ones showing some form of abnormality. Garrett Andersson's is the only Watson-figure completely emotionally detached from the abnormal people involved in the narrative, while all of the other Watson-figures bear at least some measure of emotional connection to the abnormalities they describe. A further common quality that all of the Watson-figures possess is that they love living in peace, quiet and solitude, and will express annoyance or even anger when this is somehow threatened, no matter what form this threat may take. Most clearly this is evident when Brian Page lets his feelings about the press, or outsiders to the community of Mallingsford, be known in his narration of the inquest into the cause of death of his friend:

The riot of motorcars began by nine o'clock. He had never seen so many cars in Mallingsford; the press and the outside world poured in to an extent that made him realize the noise this case

was making outside their gates. It angered him. It was, he thought, nobody else's damned business. Why didn't they put up swings and roundabouts, and sell hot dogs? They swamped the *Bull and Butcher*, in whose "hall" – a sort of long shed built for the jollification of hop-pickers – the inquest was to be held. . . . In this the people of the district moved without comment. They did not take sides. In country life each person depends on the other for something, giving and receiving; in a case like this you had to wait and see what happened, so that matters could be reasonably comfortable whichever way the verdicts went. But from the outside world came the tumult of LOST HEIR SLAIN OR LOST HEIR FRAUD?; and at eleven o'clock in the hot morning they opened the inquest. (*CH*, 121; italics original)

It is noteworthy here that Brian very distinctly compares the people of his home district with those of the outside world, especially the press who have come to find out details about the murder case of his friend. His use of words such as "riot", "swamped", "poured in" and "tumult" characterizes the press very negatively, almost akin to a horde of intrusive tourists that forces itself upon the peaceful local people of the district via the use of brute force; a comparison which is further reinforced with his sarcastic suggestion of setting up a carnival for the benefit of the outsiders. This Watson wants the people of the district to quietly sort out the matter of the inquest amongst themselves, since according to Brian they remain neutral and nonjudgmental until an official verdict is given. The press, who obviously wish to speculate about the case and how it will turn out, and the local people, who will not pass judgment during the proceedings, are sharply compared and contrasted by the Watson – with the Watson's sympathies laying distinctly amongst the local community standing united, despite the trouble and uncertainty brought on by the disruption of murder. Similar sentiments are shown by the other three Watsons as well, but never quite as clearly and contrastedly as with Brian.

With these descriptions it becomes clear throughout the novels that, in accordance with the subgeneric rules (see Appendix), the reader has access to the Watsons' thoughts and feelings and the Watson-figures do not conceal any of their thoughts from the reader. This direct access to the Watsons' opinions is important in creating an image of relatability for the reader. In the four novels analyzed there is only one brief moment where the typical genre convention is violated, and the Watson conceals their thoughts from the reader. In *The Sleeping Sphinx*, the Watson, Donald Holden, eventually manages to find out the way that the victim, Margot Marsh, was tricked into nearly

committing suicide, but instead of revealing this to the reader, this detail is kept hidden and the Watson hands his guess of the answer to Doctor Fell on a piece of paper:

“I’m going to write down, in two words, what I believe to be the key to the solution of Margot’s murder.” Holden scribbled the words, tore out the sheet, and handed it to Doctor Fell. “Will you tell me whether that’s right?”

...  
“Sir,” announced Dr. Fell, “I am an old fool.” . . .

...  
“Then that’s right, sir? What I wrote down?”

“So nearly right,” said Dr. Fell, “as makes no difference. With one slight variation, which of course you will have deduced for yourself, a ringing bull’s-eye.”

Crumpling up the piece of paper, he flung it over the fire screen into the empty grate. (*SS*, 128–129)

What is interesting about this one solitary instance is that, despite being correct, neither man intones directly what the contents of the paper were until Doctor Fell offers a full explanation at his summation at the end of the novel, and also that the answer is deliberately hidden from the reader both mentally and visually by the Watson. By not revealing his answer in his thoughts, which are otherwise always exposed, the Watson-figure is here going against a typical genre convention in an effort to both maintain the suspense and keep the reader guessing for the answer. In addition, he leaves the actual revealing of the answer to Doctor Fell. As the answer of suicide pact heavily hints at Margot’s true nature – and the Watson is himself not equipped with the infallibility of the detective – the exposing and explanation for Margot and her sexual hysteria is left for the detective to reveal. In this manner, the psychological explanation offered by Doctor Fell at the end maintains its credibility as it is offered by a figure of authority in the genre, the detective, instead of the average layman.

Above all else, these Watsons are deemed trustworthy by the characters around them because they fit in the exclusive society of the novels, whereas the abnormal characters can only attempt to blend in and pass for normal. Three of the four Watsons, Brian, Miles and Garrett, are academics or academically inclined, learned individuals, and respectable professionals with only Donald the odd one out in this respect. Their backgrounds as noted biographers and historians make them seem

trustworthy even to people they have only just met, and as Joshi has noted (29–30), they are never suspected of being criminals even if they had had opportunity to commit the crimes they witness. Even Donald – whose pre-war profession as teacher he himself somewhat disparages in his self-description – is treated with a similar air of respectability due to his distinguished military service and his inherited position of baronet. Their trustworthy nature allows other characters to confide in them details that might not otherwise be exposed (usually the only other character who people in the series confide in is Doctor Fell himself), in addition to important tasks being entrusted to them by either Fell or other characters.

A clear example of this mentality towards the Watson-figures by the other characters can be seen early on in the *Crooked Hinge* when Nathaniel Burrows, the solicitor of the impostor John Farnleigh, reveals his uncertainties about the identity dispute to Brian and asks him for help in determining which of the two claimants is the real John Farnleigh:

“Well, there you are. I’ve talked to you today as no solicitor should and few ever do; but if I can’t trust you I can’t trust anybody, and I’ve been a bit uneasy about my conduct of things since my father died. Now get into the swim. Try my spiritual difficulties for yourself. Come up to Farnleigh Close at seven o’clock; we want you as a witness. Inspect the two candidates. Exercise your intelligence. And then, before we get down to business,” said Burrows, banging the edge of his briefcase on the desk, “kindly tell me which is which.” (*CH*, 16)

This trust is not limited to characters who know the Watson-figure well as is the case in the above quotation; instead, the Watson-figures seem to very quickly gain the trust of nearly all those they meet. Only the criminals do not genuinely open up to the Watson-figures, for obvious reasons, since they do not aim to expose themselves; yet, they still play along and attempt to give the Watson-figures the impression that they are confiding something important. This plays into the limiting of the Watsons’ intelligence that Knox’s rules mandate (see Appendix), as the Watsons of the primary material never see through the criminals’ facade when they attempt to blend in and seemingly confide in the Watson. When the Watson of *The Sleeping Sphinx*, Donald, meets the criminal, Ronald Merrick, for the first time, the Watson’s impression of the young man’s reaction to him is in line with

how other similar, but normal, characters react to him, and so he is easily taken in by the public persona that Ronald exhibits. Ronald's social identity seems to match his true nature, and he blends in with ease when he comes under the Watson's scrutiny:

Holden saw instantly, as a light switch is clicked on, that he had made an ally. For this was the sort of young man who instinctively, out of a sixth sense, recognizes that congenial (and rare) type of schoolmaster whom he knows, whom he really respects, and in whom he sometimes confides as he will confide in no other person on this earth. (SS, 68)

The only time a Watson in the primary material notices that the criminal does not blend into the society is in *The Crooked Hinge*, where the primary criminal, Patrick Gore, does not even wish to attempt to do so, apart from concealing his criminality. This is because everyone from Gore's past knows him for what he was truly like as a young man, and he does not wish to pretend he is a gentleman like the impostor John Farnleigh claims to be. Gore's criminality, however, remains a mystery to the Watson before Doctor Fell reveals the truth at the end of the novel. In cases such as this, the Watson is quick to publicly point out their thoughts on the societal nonconformity if asked for their opinion. In the same passage the Watson displays a disparaging attitude towards psychoanalysis, perhaps mirroring public opinion on psychoanalysis prevalent in society at the time of the novel's publication in the 1930s:

“The unspecified profession you mentioned, the one you first made a success of at the circus. I can't decide whether you are (1) a fortune-teller, (2) a psychoanalyst, (3) a memory expert, (4) a conjuror, or even a combination of them. There are mannerisms of all of them about you, and much more besides. You are a little too suggestive of Mephistopheles in Kent. You don't belong here. You disturb things, somehow, and you give me a pain in the neck.”  
The claimant seemed pleased. (CH, 36)

It must be then noted that the Watsons only seem capable of perceiving the outwardly displayed public persona, the perceptible social identity of the people around them, which at times makes them horrible judges of character. Even when the mask of normality of the criminals slips sometimes, the Watsons make no judgment calls on it, even mistaking displays of uncharacteristic behavior from the criminals, who they perceive as normal, for something else entirely. For example, the emotional

outbursts of Harry Brooke, the criminal of *He Who Whispers* – resulting from the wrong woman being targeted and ending up as the victim, and Harry’s frustration at being foiled – the Watson, Miles, interprets as concern for the victim’s health and well-being. Joshi comments on the characterization of the criminals in Carr’s writing in the following manner: “he [Carr] oftentimes violates not fictional probability but human probability in suddenly transforming normal-seeming characters without suitable forewarning into crazed monsters” (102). However, this comment comes off as peculiar in light of the consideration that, at least in the four novels analyzed, all of the criminals show signs of abnormal or deviant behavior even before they are exposed, but the Watson-figures interpret their actions, or the motivations behind their actions, as something different or relatively benign. There is forewarning, but the Watson-figures are simply incapable of seeing the warning signs for what they are.

Similarly, owing to her husband, Thorley Marsh, and the family doctor concealing her true nature from even close family and friends, the Watson of *The Sleeping Sphinx*, Donald, is completely unaware of Margot Marsh’s sexual hysteria and the debilitating effects it had on her life and marriage. This results in Donald initially describing the marriage as a happy one and Margot as perfectly normal until evidence to the contrary surfaces. Even then, he only begins changing his mind at the urging of his love interest, Margot’s sister Celia, who is convinced that Thorley was abusing Margot, and that this led to Margot’s death. Rather than change his opinion of Margot until Doctor Fell’s analysis forces him to do so, Donald instead follows Celia’s mistaken line of reasoning in believing that Thorley was responsible for her death, and therefore the Watson’s characterization of Thorley through his narration changes in tone from an earlier amicable one to a downright hostile one. Only when Thorley’s innocence is proclaimed, and Thorley himself is seriously injured in a confrontation with the criminal, does Donald’s tone with him change back to a friendly one.

Finally, the only time the Watsons pass any kind of emotional judgment or evaluation on others is when nonconformity is readily apparent enough for even the Watson-figures to perceive.

This is usually the case with either Doctor Fell, whose disability is one of his most defining characteristics, the abnormal characters in the generic role of victim who often cannot hide their abnormality regardless of whether they remain alive or not, or those characters who are unable to hide their disabilities. Margot Marsh is in this respect the exception to this rule, as even though she is dead, her husband and the family doctor, wanting to avoid a public scandal, refuse to reveal to anyone that she was suffering from hysteria. These various judgements will be discussed more thoroughly as each abnormal character is analyzed in the following sub-section.

### 3.2. Conquering disability through infallible intelligence – Doctor Fell

The figure of the detective, especially in the subgenre of fair-play whodunit, is a very curious one, Doctor Gideon Fell being no exception to this notion. Connecting the detective figure with a tradition of Sherlockian roots, Grella describes the detective figure in the subgenre as one of pronounced eccentricity, distinct physical appearance, and a prized intelligence, features which set them apart from everyone else in the same manner that Sherlock Holmes is distinctly characterized in the stories he appears in (36). Drawing from this tradition, Joshi offers the following examination on Doctor Fell's characteristics and characterization:

More important is not the origin but the purpose of Fell's characteristics, physical or otherwise. It can scarcely be doubted that Fell – principally in his girth but also in nearly every other trait of his character – is meant to be the converse, even a parody, of Sherlock Holmes. If Holmes is gaunt and even skeletal, Fell must be grotesquely fat; if Holmes in his conversation adopts the stiff formality of a late Victorian, Fell speaks habitually with an orotund eighteenth-century diction that dynamites its own tongue-in-cheek pomposity with ludicrous wheezing . . . or slang . . . The only link between Holmes and Fell is their detective genius. (21)

What this does imply, as already somewhat discussed earlier in the theory section, is that Doctor Fell's disability, his need of two canes to walk, is never truly treated with the gravity that a mobility impairment of such magnitude should require. His disability, which has also been remedially compensated with a superhuman level of intelligence, never leads to him being treated or considered



as a truly disabled person, owing in large part due to its function of making him more visually distinct. This factor sets him apart from both the other disabled characters featured in the novels – since their disabilities, and the concrete effects these disabilities have had on the lives of the disabled people themselves, are thoroughly discussed and analyzed – and the nondisabled, as he is very distinctly different from all of them, both physically and mentally.

Indeed, Doctor Fell's distinct physical appearance is the subject of much commentary throughout the novels, and it takes the form of rendering what we can see of his mobility impairment in terms of disability-in-dialogue. There is, however, the added twist that, unlike what is normally the case with disability-in-dialogue as established in the theory section, when Fell's physical appearance or his disability is narrated in such a manner, emotional reaction is often included. Therefore, unlike the typically tone neutral depiction of disability in this form of narrating disability, the tone in these instances is not neutral at all. While at times this tone is somewhat comedic in nature, often these comedic remarks are Doctor Fell's comments on himself in fact, a recurring theme when he is introduced in each story is instead that of majesty or mysticity:

The other [man] was immensely tall and immensely fat, his long dark cape making him appear even more vast; he strode along with a rolling motion like an emperor, and the sound of his throat clearing preceded him like a war-cry.

...

He came rolling forward majestically, swinging a cane, and towered over Miles as his footsteps thundered and shook on the planks of the bridge.

'Sir,' intoned Dr Fell, adjusting his eyeglasses as he peered down like a very large djinn taking form, 'good evening.' (*HWW*, 70–71)

Down he came rolling majestically, an enormous shape with a box-pleated cape round his shoulders, supporting himself on two canes. . . . And he beamed on them like a walking furnace.

...

Approaching the group by the middle window, he cleared his throat with a long challenging sound like a war cry.

...

Everything about him was huger than life, including emotions. (*SS*, 77–78)

Similar descriptions of Doctor Fell are offered by all of the Watsons, with perhaps the most distinct one emphasizing his mysticity is when his lumbering, wheezing walk as he smokes is compared to

the Hawaiian volcano goddess Pele in *The House at Satan's Elbow*: “Breathing smoke and sparks like the Spirit of the Volcano, he lumbered towards the door to the passage” (*HSE*, 140). In instances such as these, his mobility impairment is a mere afterthought, and his motion becomes fluid, “rolling”, while still maintaining an air of majesty and dignity.

Furthermore, unlike with the other disabled characters in the narratives, there is next to no sympathy towards Doctor Fell for his disability, which is connected to his status as a “super cripp” type of detective discussed earlier in the thesis: he is not considered to be a disabled person, largely because he is able to function in society due to his vast, compensating intelligence. As was outlined by way of Davis’s idea in the theory section, those characters who are able to perform the role of the nondisabled are not considered disabled at all (10), and Doctor Fell is a prime example of this type of notion in practice in the subgenre.

All of this can be tied to the powerful authority that the detective figure in the subgenre has been stated to hold, as Doctor Fell offers conclusive, infallible explanations for mysteries – his infallible nature being as mystical as his unique appearance, and the impression he leaves on all of the Watsons – and his large figure, said to be “towering” over the Watson, also lends him a very commanding presence. Fell uses his large bulk and commanding, war-cry-like voice whenever he needs to coerce or force suspects or witnesses to co-operate with him. Indeed, as Joshi notes of Fell’s otherwise characteristic silly behavior, “Rarely does Fell let the mask of clownishness slip off, but on those rare occasions when he does so he can be as ruthless and intimidating as any American private eye. . . . Fell’s clownish behaviour is also sloughed off when lives are on the line” (23).

Despite all this, there are several instances in the narratives where Doctor Fell’s disability is brought up in a manner that highlights its impairing nature. It is noteworthy of several of these instances that, in keeping with the trust placed in the Watson-figures shown earlier, Doctor Fell needs others to do his “legwork” for him. While his immense intelligence and vast collection of esoteric knowledge allow him to solve crimes, he himself very rarely physically visits the exact crime scenes,

and when he needs something done quickly – such as sparing evidence from being destroyed or saving someone’s life – Doctor Fell will always rely on the Watson-figures to do his bidding.

Both *He Who Whispers* and *The Sleeping Sphinx* features scenes where Doctor Fell has the Watson rush off to perform actions that would be physically impossible for Fell. For example, in *The Sleeping Sphinx* when Doctor Fell needs evidence that he knows is about to be destroyed by the criminal, he urges Donald to rush off to the location where it is hidden, and break the law if necessary to stop the criminal and obtain the evidence. Doctor Fell follows the Watson, but arrives on the scene only an hour later – having left behind his hat, cape and, notably, one of his canes in his hurry to get to the scene – and he is noted to be furiously mopping his forehead and wheezing to catch his breath when he arrives. Without the Watson’s unimpaired movement, the crucial evidence would have been destroyed. Similarly, in *He Who Whispers* Doctor Fell charges Miles with keeping Fay Seton safe when Fell believes the criminal will target her next. In this case Fell and the police arrive later to apprehend the criminal and offer rational explanations, but the criminal is prevented from attacking Fay only by the Watson’s timely arrival.

Perhaps the most notable moment where Fell’s disability is the focus occurs in *The Crooked Hinge*, where, in an uncharacteristically rare use of disability-in-action with regards to Doctor Fell, a large iron automaton on wheels, the Golden Hag, is pushed down a flight of stairs that Doctor Fell is descending:

And that was when the automaton moved.

. . . What they did see was three-hundred-weight of rattling iron darting out of reach and driving like a gun-carriage for the well of the stairs. What they heard was the screech of the wheels, the tap of Dr. Fell’s stick on the stairs, and Elliot’s scream:

*“For God’s sake, look out below!”*

Page reached it. He had his fingers round the iron box, and he might’ve just as well have tried to stop a runaway gun; but he kept it upright when it might’ve gone head-over-heels-side-to-side, sweeping the whole staircase in crazy descent and crushing everything in its way. The black weight kept to its wheels. Sprawling down the first steps, Page saw Dr. Fell peering upwards – halfway down. . . . He saw Dr. Fell, unable to move an inch in that enclosed space, throw up one hand as though to ward off a blow. He saw, out of an inferno of crashings, the black shape plunge past within a hair’s clearance. (*CH*, 115–116; italics original)

In this scene it must immediately be noted that Doctor Fell himself would have been at the very least severely injured by the automaton crashing into him without the Watson's timely assistance, and that he is distinctly noted as being quite literally unable to move out of the way in the stairwell. Although the stairwell is said to be enclosed, a tight space, there is said to be just enough clearance for the automaton to miss hitting him, and it is Doctor Fell's mobility impairment alone that brings about the danger in the scene.

Most scenes where Doctor Fell's disability is brought up in a serious manner are not as severe or dangerous as the one detailed above, rather they showcase simple everyday things and aspects of life that are perfectly ordinary for nondisabled people, such as the Watsons, but are next to impossible for Fell to perform. *The Sleeping Sphinx* contains a few such brief moments, one being when Doctor Fell's hat and one of his canes have fallen on the floor, and he is physically unable to pick them up, instead needing to ask the Watson to lift them for him. Similarly, in all of the novels, whenever Doctor Fell moves, the movement is said to be lumbering, clumsy or awkward; only when he uses his authority or he is introduced for the first time in each novel is his movement superseded by the majestic or mystical air about him.

Where the Watson-figures defined normality by acting as a contrast and commentator for perceptible abnormality, Doctor Fell does almost the same for both the perceptible forms and those imperceptible to the Watson in the role of the detective. While Doctor Fell himself is not directly compared or contrasted with the abnormal characters like the Watson-figures might be, his analysis of their true natures and characters is the other chief source of defining normality through abnormality found within the novels. The genre conventions of the fair-play whodunit, established earlier in the theory section, lend the archetypal figure of the detective an air of infallibility, which Doctor Fell uses in a number of ways throughout the stories.

The first of these ways is the sense of narrative closure that only the detective figure can provide in the subgenre, and this usually takes the form of a summation at or near the end of a story.

Within the summations of the analyzed novels, Fell provides the other characters and the reader with the solutions to the mysteries presented, and, in addition, seeks to explain why the abnormal characters behaved in the way that they did. This last aspect is notable because it enables understanding, and a conscious moral evaluation to be put forward to the reader in a process similar to what Evans described in the theory section (163–164), wherein the reader ends the reading of the classical detective novel a better person than they were to begin with. Unlike laypeople like the Watsons, and even actual medical doctors in the novels, Doctor Fell, a lexicographer, is never shown to be wrong in a diagnosis he provides, or to be otherwise mistaken in the characterizations he provides of the true natures of the abnormal people. The reader's possible past familiarity with the subgenre also guides them towards trusting everything Doctor Fell says to be factual, as the honesty and trustworthiness of the detective is what the subgeneric conventions and rules, such as Knox's, mandate (see Appendix). These diagnoses reflect the position of the detective, as stated by Howe as a filler of gaps in scientific or psychological knowledge (29). Each diagnosis and character analysis will be analyzed, when relevant, when the abnormal characters are discussed further on in this chapter.

The second way in which Doctor Fell utilizes his infallibility and his authoritative position as a detective is the way he acts as a force of comfort and reassurance. Tying in with the reassuring and conformist aims of the subgenre, as established using Howe's definition in the theory section (36–37), Doctor Fell is characterized as someone who just by his mere presence can sooth the minds of both the wrongly accused and the Watsons. Most importantly, Fell is repeatedly said to be the very personification of Father Christmas or Old King Cole by all of the Watsons:

The red face shone behind the eyeglasses. Untidy in black alpaca, his other hand on the handle of a crutch headed stick, he stood swaying like a tethered elephant. Yet even that drugged hour of the morning could not lessen his spiritual kinship with Father Christmas or Old King Cole. (*HSE*, 125)

What is noteworthy about the comparisons to both equally fictional figures is what they represent: both are, as they are usually understood, bulky, old men with a sense of fatherliness about them. These

comparisons are made by the Watsons primarily when Doctor Fell is reassuring or comforting someone, usually a wrongly accused suspect. Fell in his position as an infallible detective figure is the only character who can offer such reassurance. Grella characterizes Doctor Fell in a similar vein:

Neither a dandy nor an elf, the third major problem-solver is the wizard. The detectives in this category retain the powerful physical presence and the convincing infallibility of the Sherlockian tradition. . . . John Dickson Carr's Sir Henry Merrivale and, above all, Dr. Gideon Fell, are the most successful examples and the closest to the Great Detective. A scholar and lexicographer specializing in Satanism and witchcraft, Dr. Fell usually encounters the "impossible" murder, committed in the traditional hermetically sealed room. . . . His joviality, his resemblance to the kindly father figures of legend, and his expertise in the supernatural ally him with an archetypal wizard, Jung's Wise Old Man, the good magician or Prospero figure. (38–39)

In his manner Fell is thus portrayed in the narratives as both fatherly and comforting. His infallibility combined with his jovial character allow him to act as a figure of reassurance, as he is the only character in the narratives with the capability to reach the truth behind people's true natures, and exonerate those falsely accused of crime or abnormality. Indeed, Fell does both at one time in *The Sleeping Sphinx*, where Celia Devereux – sister of Margot Marsh, the victim – is falsely accused of both being a murderer, and suspected of suffering from nervous hysteria. Fell and the Watson, Donald, spend much of the novel disproving both notions, while attempting to find the true culprit, and unveiling Margot's history of sexual hysteria over the course of their investigation.

Finally, unlike the Watson-figures or even the police, and very much like some of the medical doctors shown in the novels, Doctor Fell is eminently more invested and interested in psychology and the study of human behavior when solving crimes than the average layperson. When no material clues surfaces at the beginning of the criminal investigation in *The Crooked Hinge*, Doctor Fell expresses the notion that psychology will be invaluable in finding both the criminal and in reasoning their motive in the murder of the impostor John Farnleigh, but also in solving the earlier murder of Victoria Daly, a local woman:

“. . . an almost purely psychological puzzle. . . . Above all, there is an almost complete lack of material clues:. . . . Unless we get our claws on something more tangible, we shall merely

fumble with the greased pig called human behavior. Which person, then, would be most likely to kill the man who was killed? And why? And which person fits best psychologically, into the pattern of devilry you've drawn round Victoria Daly's murder?" (*CH*, 63)

Fell expresses similar sentiments of the need for psychology in crime solving in the other novels as well, particularly when the need to find out the truth behind the strange behavior of several characters in the narratives becomes necessary. Fell's previously defined position of infallibility makes his investment in psychology of particular note, as the reader is able to trust any diagnosis he provides in the narratives, and, owing to the formulaic nature of the subgenre, a certain type of abnormal character will always behave in a particular manner, and is part of the concept of knowable types that is inherent in the subgenre as Howe explained (18). As explained by Susan Rowland (2010, 122) the typical detective of the Golden Age whodunit "discovers that human inner worlds matter too. The irrational side of the human psyche and of human social groups matter as well and must be understood by more than logic." The detective figure is, according to Rowland, a new hero for the post-war traumatized landscape (120), which seems to hold true for Fell due to his keen insight into not only psychology, but also due to the deeper practical meanings behind the various diagnoses he provides over the course of the narratives.

### 3.3. Abnormal characters – disability and deviance

Where Doctor Fell, as a detective figure, is treated as normal and nondisabled in the narratives, such is not the case with the criminals and several of the victims. Both classes of subgeneric archetype are deeply connected with abnormality, both disability and deviance, in the Gideon Fell novels, but they differ on a number of points in this regard. While both criminals and victims are usually deemed socially unfit in the subgenre according to Grella (41), and are therefore concerned with blending into the exclusive social setting, what abnormality characters in these archetypes are trying to hide, and how successful they are in this regard, varies considerably. Furthermore, the way abnormality is handled in the novels changes based on whether it is deviant behavior, disability or deviant behavior

brought on by disability that is being explained by Fell and commented on by Watson and other normative characters.

As I begin analyzing the other abnormal characters, it has to be noted that, in order to maintain proper context, it is necessary to analyze several characters in connection with one another. However, primarily all characters will be analyzed within the context of the novels in which they appear, and when comparisons between novels need to be made, they will be done only after each of the characters so compared has been introduced. For clarity and cohesion, this will necessitate analysis of the characters of each novel in chronological order of publication, beginning with *The Crooked Hinge*.

The novel contains three noteworthy abnormal characters: John Farnleigh, the victim, Molly Farnleigh, his wife and one of the criminals, and Patrick Gore, the primary criminal. All three are criminally deviant characters, but John and Patrick are particularly noteworthy in this regard because they are also disabled, they are both directly compared with one another throughout the novel, and the ways both their disabilities have affected their natures is also worthy of some consideration. The Watson, Brian, knows John and Molly personally, and is John's friend, but, despite this, he is completely unaware of either one's true nature, or even of John's disability, until details begin to emerge under Doctor Fell's investigation.

What is curious to notice in the novel is the conscious debate throughout the narrative over whether John Farnleigh – or, more accurately, an impostor claiming to be him – is worthy of any sympathy as a victim. This debate is connected to the question of whether his imposture was purposeful, a matter cast into some doubt when it is discovered that he was suffering from amnesia, and whether or not he was murdered or if he committed suicide. Indeed, the questions of murder versus suicide and real heir versus impostor are brought up only minutes after Farnleigh's death:

“You mean suicide,” said Burrows, wiping his hands. “We’ve had a hallucination of murder put on us, but I don’t like this any better. You see what it means? It means he was the impostor after all. He bluffed it out as long as he could, and hoped against hope that Murray might not have the fingerprints. When the test was over he couldn’t face the consequences. So he came out here, stood on the edge of the pool and—” Burrows put up a hand to his throat.



It all fitted very well.

“I’m afraid so,” admitted Page. Afraid? Afraid? Yes: wasn’t that the worst charge you could make against a dead friend, pile the whole burden on him now that he couldn’t speak? Resentment rose up in a dull ache, for John Farnleigh had been his friend. “But it’s the only thing we can think. For God’s sake what happened here? Did you see him do it? What did he do it with?” (*CH*, 48)

This Watson – who describes the rural community of Mallingford as harmonious and unjudging in comparison to the outside world in the novel – does not want to believe his friend could have been an impostor. Brian is also briefly disgusted with himself for suggesting the notion, because this kind of accusation goes against the innocent until proven guilty mentality of the community. Before the murder occurs he has noted on multiple occasions how well John Farnleigh fit in after his return from America following over 20 years of absence, and many notes about Farnleigh’s character the Watson has made previously he subsequently begins to doubt.

Both before and after the murder, Farnleigh is compared in many respects to Gore. Several characters also note that they are nothing alike, most notably Farnleigh’s solicitor Burrows when he states that, ““Here are two men. One is the real baronet and the other is a masquerading fraud. The two men are not alike; they don’t even *look* alike. And yet may I be damned if I can decide which is which”” (12; italics original). In keeping with subgeneric conventions, notably Knox’s rule #10 that forbids unexpected doubles or identical twins (see Appendix), the two claimants in the identity dispute are introduced early, and they are both very distinct characters from one another, although some similarities in their true natures are noted at the end.

These comparisons between Farnleigh and Gore are varied and numerous, and they all raise an interesting point. Namely that Farnleigh, in his puritanical nature, suits the role of a country gentleman better than the rough and rude Gore does. Farnleigh, despite not being the real heir, does not only blend into the society, he fits in nigh perfectly:

Page liked both the dark, rather jumpy John Farnleigh and his forthright wife, Molly. The life here suited Farnleigh well; he fitted; he was a born squire, in spite of having been so long away from his home. For Farnleigh’s story was another one of those romantic tales which

inspired Page and which now seemed difficult to reconcile with the solid, almost commonplace baronet at Farnleigh Close. (*CH*, 10)

He seemed an ideal partner for her. It would convey the wrong impression to say that he looked in his element as a country squire, for the word has come to be associated with beefy roisterers of a hundred years ago. Yet there is a truer type. Farnleigh was of middle height, of a stringy, active leanness which somehow suggested the lines of a plow: the bright metal, the compactness, the crisp blade that cuts the furrow. (18)

All of these observations of the Watson-figure about Farnleigh's nature are correct, except for his relationship with his wife Molly, which is in keeping with the Watson-figures being poor judges of character beyond the surface level. Farnleigh's true nature is said to be puritanical, which is very true, but there are hints of a hidden dangerousness about him at times. Due to the head trauma he sustained aboard the Titanic, Farnleigh suffers from amnesia which has completely erased his memories of who he was, and how he attempted to murder Patrick Gore – the real Farnleigh – in order to steal his identity as the ship was sinking. His amnesia has thus lead to him reverting merely to his puritanical, genteel-like behavior, unaware even himself of his past criminality. This leads to people like the Watson characterizing him largely as he appears, a natural gentleman and an upstanding member of the community of Mallingford. Therefore, Farnleigh's social identity and self-identity match perfectly, but his past criminal deviance appears for a few brief moments, which hints that, in keeping with the concept of subjectivity, deviance is within his nature and cannot be completely erased.

It thus becomes necessary to consider the implications raised by Farnleigh's amnesia, because his deviant criminality is thereby hidden from even himself, and the implications this raises over his blending into society; Farnleigh does not need to attempt to blend in, for he believes he truly is the real John Farnleigh, and his natural puritanism lends itself well to heading an estate. Only when doubts over his identity are raised, does his deviance shine through:

He looked slowly round the room. He seemed to be listening to the quiet ticking of the clock, to be savoring the odors of scrubbed floors and fresh curtains, to be reaching out in the sunlight over all the rich and quiet acres he now owned. At that moment, oddly enough, he looked most like a Puritan; and also he looked dangerous.

"It would be rather rotten," he said slowly, "to lose all this now." (20)

Here, despite his amnesia, a hint of his criminality is visible, which is why the narration notes that it is odd, as the Watson has no reason to believe Farnleigh is anything but a good-hearted aristocrat. This hints at what is later suggested by Patrick Gore in an exchange with Farnleigh about the true natures of people; even if the person themselves is not conscious of it, even if it has been muddled by time, there is no changing who or what a person truly is: “‘There’s a lot of rubbish that’s best forgotten. People change. They change, I tell you.’ ‘But not their basic characters, as you profess to have changed. That is the point I am making. You cannot turn your whole soul inside out, you know’” (34). This seems to be a viewpoint held throughout all of the novels, but nowhere else is it pointed out as sharply as in that exchange, tying into the previously established notion that in this subgenre a certain type of person will always behave in a certain manner.

Despite the hint of criminal deviance in him, Farnleigh, due to his amnesia, is later noted by a close friend of his to be consciously worried that he might not really be Farnleigh once the claimant, Patrick Gore, appears. Furthermore, Farnleigh is said to be also worried that if he should turn out to not be the real heir, it might mean that he would be a criminal. Even if his imposture was not on purpose, how he came to pretend to be Farnleigh in the first place deeply troubles him. However, once he hears certain details in the claimant’s account of the Titanic disaster, when the imposture began, he is renewed with confidence in the notion that he is the real Farnleigh. As a friend who Farnleigh confided in explains at the inquest into his cause of death:

“But you know what boys of that age are. He was very frightened and horribly worried. For he didn’t know anything about himself. And worst of all, like boys of that age, he didn’t dare tell anybody for fear he might be mad or there might be something wrong with him or they might put him in jail.

“That’s how it seemed to him. He hadn’t any reason to think he *wasn’t* this John Farnleigh. He hadn’t any reason to believe they weren’t telling the truth in all they told himself. . . .

“He nursed that little secret for years. . . .”

. . .

“When I heard about the claimant to the estate and his lawyer, I knew what John had been thinking. You know now what was in his mind all along. You can follow every step of his thoughts and every word he said. You know now why he smiled, and why the relief was almost too much, when he heard the claimant’s story about the seaman’s mallet and the blows

on the head in the wreck of the *Titanic*. For *he* was the one who suffered from concussion of the brain and a loss of memory that lasted for twenty-five years.

“. . . But Sir John – the one you call the deceased as though he had never been alive – must have felt a mighty relief when he heard something that in his eyes couldn’t possibly have been true. He saw his dream being fulfilled at last, that his identity should be proved.” (127–129; *italics original*)

What is most striking about the account is the amount of understanding and sympathy afforded to Farnleigh, despite his archetypal position as a victim and his imposture. This understanding is not connected to his deviance, for criminally deviant individuals are afforded no sympathy in the Fell narratives, but rather his mental disability in the form of amnesia. His behavior and imposture are excused by the reality that he was not aware of it himself, and could not have known. His disability affords him a position of understanding and sympathy in the narrative as his murder is then investigated in the latter half of the novel.

The fact that the quoted extract requests understanding of Farnleigh’s thinking, background and motivations, and calls for sympathy at the same time, is something that is granted to him only because of his amnesiac nature. Without the condition, he would have been an evil fraud, as theorized by some of the characters before his amnesia is discovered. Indeed, when Doctor Fell and the Watson-figure question Farnleigh’s friend further after the inquest, sympathy for Farnleigh is made even more explicit:

“What’s your real opinion, Madeline, about the real heir? You told me yesterday you thought the late Farnleigh was an impostor. Do you?”

“Yes, I do. But I don’t see how anybody could keep from feeling sorry for him. He didn’t want to be an impostor, don’t you see? He only wanted to know who he was.” (133)

“Still,” argued Dr. Fell, “at risk of seeming to make more mysteries, I’m going to ask you another question. You knew the late Farnleigh very well. Now, the point is nebulous and psychological again; . . . Why did Farnleigh worry for twenty-five years? Why was he weighed down and oppressed in the blindness of his memory? . . . Was he, for instance, tortured by a memory of crime or evil?”

She nodded. “Yes, I believe he was.” (137)

Despite the fact that his attempted murder of the real Farnleigh aboard the *Titanic* is later exposed, it does not invalidate the sympathy offered to him. Madeline, Farnleigh’s friend, is aware of the

possibility that Farnleigh is not who he appears to be and that he may have murdered the real Farnleigh, yet treats him as a tragic and sympathetic figure. Even when the truth is completely exposed at the end, and Patrick Gore is allowed the final word in his letter of confession, the tone taken with Farnleigh remains one of deep sympathy towards him. In an interesting way, Farnleigh's amnesia has allowed him to do what Patrick Gore says to him cannot be done; he has become a better person, though his puritanism was noted by Gore to have been how he originally was already, but it has to be noted he has not committed any crimes, indeed is not deviant at all, since the Titanic disaster erased his memories of who he was twenty-five years prior to the beginning of the story; Farnleigh has become an accepted, useful member of society.

As I discussed earlier, Patrick Gore – unlike Farnleigh, who did not belong at first into the society – is not actually interested in blending into the local society, aside from hiding his criminality, as everyone who knew him as a boy knows how he is truly like in character, and this improves his chances of being recognized as the real heir. It is noteworthy that in character and beginnings Gore was the complete polar opposite of the impostor, Farnleigh; where Farnleigh did not initially belong in the society, but had a character that suited fitting in, conversely, Gore belonged in the society, but had a deviant character that made fitting in impossible for him. Indeed, one of the first things we learn about Gore is how he was as a young child in comparison to how his impostor is at present:

“Young Dudley was a good boy. John wasn't. He was a dark, quiet, wild sort of boy, but with so much sullenness that nobody could pardon the least offensive things he did. There was no real harm in him; it was merely that he didn't fit and wanted to be treated as a grown-up before he had grown up. In nineteen-twelve, when he was fifteen, he had a fully-grown-up affair with a barmaid in Maidstone—”

...

Page hesitated. “And yet, you know, I'd always thought from what I've seen of him that Farnleigh was—”

“A bit of a Puritan?” Supplied Burrows. “Yes. Anyhow, we're talking about a boy aged fifteen. His studying occult matters, including witchcraft and Satanism, was bad enough. His being expelled from Eton was worse. But the public scandal with the barmaid, who thought she was going to have a child, finished it. Sir Dudley Farnleigh simply decided that the boy was bad clean through, some throwback to the Satanist Farnleighs: that nothing would ever change him: and that he did not care to see him again.” (13)

It is interesting to notice that John Farnleigh's apparent complete change in character is treated as a natural consequence of his growing up, and that his deviant behavior was caused, at least in part, by his young age, which explains the mention of "boy" when the Watson brings up the comparison to how his impostor is as an adult.

What is noteworthy about all of this is the supposed cycle of deviant behavior moral panics in the general society seem to perpetuate. In Gore's case the people around him, notably his family, saw his behavior as deviant, and labeled him as such. This did little to change him, and, indeed, a clear progression can be seen from his interest in reading about the occult to next being expelled from school and finally having an affair with a local woman. His labeling as deviant breaker of social norms merely lead to increasingly worsening deviation from what the society around him considered to be normal, until his family simply had enough and sent him away to America to live among distant relatives. It must also be noted that a family history of deviant behavior is heavily implied by the mention of Gore being a "throwback to the Satanist Farnleights", which is further reinforced by a large library of books on the occult discovered later in a locked attic at the estate belonging to one of the Farnleights of the past.

Gore is also a clear example of his own philosophy of a person never being able to change who they truly are: he has not abandoned his deviant behavior. On the contrary, he revels in the power his insight into how people behave and his ability to change his height at will afford him. He later confesses expressly to this effect as part of his letter of confession at the end of the novel, having played the part of multiple different people following the loss of his legs in the Titanic disaster; conning people of their money as a dwarf-sized fortuneteller being the most recent episode he fondly recalls.

As noted in the section discussing the Watsons, Gore is highly proud of his background in working in the circus, and carries himself in a manner described as "Mephistophelian" by the Watson of the novel. Only on a few occasions do his calm, Mephistophelian mannerisms change drastically

enough to alert the attention of the Watson. The first occasion this occurs suggests to the Watson that Gore conceals a very violent temper underneath his calm exterior, a notion not too far from the truth (40). Indication of this temper is also evidenced by Gore himself reminiscing about the voyage aboard the Titanic, and stating that when he met the impostor Farnleigh for the first time, ““we flew at each other and fought until half the steerage had to drag us apart. I am afraid I was so enraged I wanted to go at him afterwards with my clasp-knife”” (26). The other occasions are connected to when his disability, the fact that he has no legs, is either at risk of being exposed or is otherwise suggested to have been the trick behind the murder. In fact, he even lashes out at one of the few people he has ever genuinely liked, Murray, when Murray is the one who suggests that a legless creature has made an appearance:

“And on your homecoming,” said Murray, “you are greeted by a crawling legless something in the garden, and a housemaid frightened into a fit. Look here, young Johnny: you’re not up to your old tricks of frightening people, are you?”

To Page’s surprise, Gore’s dusky face had gone pale. Murray, it appeared, was the only person who could sting him or rouse him out of his urbanity.

“No,” Gore said. “You know where I was. I was keeping an eye on you in the library. And just one more thing. Just who the hell do you think you are, to talk to me as though I were still a fifteen-year-old child? You kow-towed to my father; and, by God, I’ll have decent respect from you or I’ll take a cane to you as you used to do to me.” (96)

Gore is furious, not only because Murray has purely by coincidence brought up the suggestion that the killer has no legs, something he wishes to avoid being mentioned as it was the trick behind the murder, but also because Murray is treating him as if he was still a child. This is one of the rare moments where Gore is suggested to be a truly dangerous man, since previously his deviant antics as a child were considered largely harmless in terms of criminality. This is connected to how at no point in the story does Gore show any indication that he thinks what he has done is wrong or condemnable, whether his past behavior or the murder he has committed is concerned, and in his confession he shows no remorse for his actions either. As a matter of fact, he expresses the sentiment that he should do it all again, given the chance.

Despite these indications of monstrosity in character and true, physical appearance, in characterizing Gore, Doctor Fell very matter-of-factly states that Gore is not a monster all the while prefacing his character analysis with a comparison to the Golden Hag, an old, rotten automaton, stored at the mansion:

“Consider the character of the murderer. A sly, cracked head – like the dummy’s; under that pleasant exterior – just as the dummy used to have. But emphatically not a fabled monster, intent on strewing the place with corpses. Not a monster at all. A moderate murderer, my lad. When I think of the number of persons who, by all the law of progressive homicide, *should* have been murdered in this case, I have a tendency towards gooseflesh.”

...

“This murderer is human, my lad. I’m not, you understand, praising the murderer for this sporting restraint and good manners in refraining from killing people. But, my God, Elliot, the people who have gone in danger from the first! . . . And not one of them has been touched. Is it vanity? Or what?” (149–150; italics original)

This should not be mistaken for sympathy for Gore, for, unlike Farnleigh, Gore does not receive a sympathetic portrayal, since he is both a deviant individual unwanted by the society, and because he is an unrepentant killer. Understanding for his character is afforded by Fell, but only insofar as is required in order to understand his motivations, and why he committed murder in the first place. Indeed, Gore addresses the points raised by Doctor Fell as to why he did not murder anyone but Farnleigh, even though doing so would have allowed Gore to possibly avoid being exposed as the criminal:

Had I been the bowelless and altogether unbelievable person you will probably hear described, I should without a doubt have decided to kill Knowles as casually as paring an onion. But who could kill Knowles? Who could kill Madeline Dane? Who could kill Betty Harbottle? These are real people that I have known, not dummies to pad out a chapter; and they are not to be treated like stuffed cats at a fair. (191)

Gore’s comment betrays a certain amount of genre awareness which he displays only once before in the novel; earlier, before the murder is committed, he is the one who puts forward the theory that it will be Murray who shall die, and his phrasing leaves very little doubt in the matter of whether he knows, at least to some extent, that he is in a murder mystery: “‘If events ran according to form,’ he answered with relish, ‘Murray would already have been murdered and his body hidden in the pond



in the garden” (35). This genre awareness places him in the position of “mirror image” of the detective as explained by Howe of the typical role of the criminal in the subgenre (35), in the sense that Doctor Fell, as noted earlier, is also aware of the generic limitations placed upon their setting. Gore calling out for the people he has known to be treated as real, despite his knowledge to the contrary, is one of the few indications towards Doctor Fell’s assessment that the man is not a monster being correct.

Lastly, as regards Gore, he is the only criminal in the novels analyzed who is allowed to speak in his own defence after being exposed. The other criminals – Molly Farnleigh, Harry Brooke, Ronald Merrick, and Andrew Dawlish – are not allowed to say anything after their true natures have been exposed. While Joshi does claim that *The Crooked Hinge*, “contains at its conclusion a letter from the murderer that, in its arrogance and pomposity, is meant to condemn him in our eyes” (32), I argue that this is only partially the case. By allowing the criminal a chance to speak in their own defence, their abnormality and social nonconformity are laid bare more openly, but at the same time, by giving the criminal the final word, a certain sense of understanding, though most definitely not sympathy, is perhaps conveyed to the reader.

While Patrick Gore, and Molly who shall be discussed next, are condemned as deviant and abnormal people, Gore is allowed the possibility of being presented in a more balanced manner when compared to the other criminals. I argue this has to do more so with his disability than with his deviant nature, for, as can be seen with the other disabled characters, there is far more understanding and sympathy for them than there is for individuals who are merely deviant somehow. In Gore’s case, however, his archetypal role as the criminal and his deviant nature override any notion of sympathy being offered to him, while with the other disabled characters, their archetypal roles as victims allow them to be portrayed in a sympathetic light far more easily; although, this latter matter is quite contrary to how the typical subgeneric convention would have operated typically, with archetypal victims portrayed as unsympathetically as possible according to critics such as Grella (41).

Molly Farnleigh, the last of the abnormal characters to be analyzed from *The Crooked Hinge*, is in comparison to both John Farnleigh and Patrick Gore a far more straightforward case of deviancy. As mentioned previously, Molly is the other criminal in the novel, although she does not take active part in the murder of Farnleigh, and a deviant person that is condemned in the summation of the novel. Unlike either Farnleigh or Gore, Molly is not treated with any sympathy or even much understanding once her true nature is exposed, as she has no mitigating or redeeming qualities about her that the other two abnormal figures possess. The only character who speaks highly of her once she is exposed is Gore, but he is neither a part of society nor a neutral person when it comes to Molly – for they are both madly in love with one another – so his biased characterization and viewpoint cannot be concluded to be the position the reader is perhaps meant to take on her. Indeed, one of the first things we learn of Molly is that as a child she was “frantically devoted to him [the real Farnleigh – Gore]. She wouldn’t hear a word against him” (13).

These feelings are one of the few factual things that the Watson of the novel knows for certain about Molly that are actually true; the rest of Molly’s public persona is a carefully crafted facade of respectability under which she hides her true deviant nature. Throughout the novel Molly is presented as a model, upper-class wife who suits Farnleigh very well. She passes for normal easily in the society because she was born into it, and, as pointed out by Farnleigh’s lawyer in passing, is rich even in her own right, possessing considerable inherited wealth. Like all of the criminals in the primary material, save Gore, she has always belonged in the society and is not an outsider at all, although by the same measure her true, abnormal nature prohibits her from ever truly fitting in. Only her strong dislike of formality and disinterest in managing her estates perceivable outwardly about her are noted by the Watsons as something unlike a typical woman of her position of the time.

It is notably that her criminality predates the beginning of the story, and although she does not take active part in the actual murder of her husband, she conspires with Gore to commit the crime. Her prior criminality also involves a fake witch cult she has founded with some of her friends in high

society, and, although the fake cult itself is not illegal by any means, the hallucinogenic drugs Molly hands over to her friends in connection with their activities are. Her need to hide this abnormal, deviant behavior from everyone feeds into more of a similar kind of behavior in a manner akin to how moral panics fed into Gore's childhood behavior. Doctor Fell characterizes Molly's true nature in connection to this:

"You have among you somebody whose mind and heart have been steeped for years in a secret love of these [occult] things and what they stand for. Not a belief in them! That I hasten to point out. That I emphasize. Nobody could be more cynical as regards the powers of darkness and the lords of the four-went-ways. But a surpassing love of them, made all the more powerful and urgent by an (altogether prudish) necessity for never letting it show. This person will never admit before you to even have an interest in such matters, an interest such as you and I might have. So that secret interest – the desire to share it – the desire, above all, to experiment on other people – grew so strong that it had to burst its bonds somehow."

...

"This, I emphasize was no measured affiliation with the powers of evil, supposing any such powers to exist. It had no such high ambition; or, to put it more properly, no such high-falutin. It was not carefully planned. It was not managed by a person of any such high intelligence. It was not a cult as we know cults seriously developed. It was simply an idle and greedy liking for such things, a kind of hobby. Lord love you, I don't suppose any great harm would have been done – if the person had kept away from poisonous drugs to produce hallucinations. (162)

Essentially, having to suppress her real interests and desires due to their socially unacceptable nature has – once again – lead to behavior that is even worse than simply pretending to worship Satan would already in itself be in the exclusive society depicted. Indeed, earlier, when Doctor Fell finds out about Molly's true nature, he cryptically intones that, "Satanism itself is an honest and straightforward business compared to the intellectual pleasures a certain person has invented" (115), suggesting that what she has been doing is worse than if she were to really be a practising Satanist.

The quoted passage further indicates that Molly, despite her obviously deviant nature, is not delusional or insane; she is rationally aware of what she is doing, and is aware of the fact that what she and her friends experience via the hallucinogenic drugs is purely fictional. As with Gore, no sympathy is afforded to her in Doctor Fell's analysis, only just enough understanding so as to find

out why she did what she did – the rationale behind her deviant and criminal actions. Doctor Fell’s character analysis into her true nature continues:

“This person chose a few suitable and sympathetic friends to confide in. There were not many: two or three or four, perhaps. We shall probably never know who they are. This person had many talks with them. Many books were given or loaned. Then, when the friend’s mind was sufficiently stuffed and excited with wild lore, it was time. It was time to inform the friend that there really was a Satanist cult hereabouts, to which the candidate could now be admitted.”

“Of course there never was any such thing. Of course the neophyte never left the house or stirred from one room on the night of the gatherings. Of course it was all a matter of an ointment whose two chief ingredients were aconite and belladonna.

“... The pleasure lay in spreading this gospel: in sharing accounts of (mythical) adventures: in watching the decay of minds under the effects of the drug and under the effects of what they thought they had seen at the sabbaths: in short, of combining a degree of rather heavy-witted mental cruelty with the pleasure of letting loose this interest in a safe and narrow circle.” (163)

Two things become immediately apparent from Doctor Fell’s summary of Molly’s true nature. Firstly, the fact that the people involved in the deviant behavior with her will never be identified. This notion of some forms of deviant behavior and some deviant people going unidentified and unpunished by the criminal justice system is to some extent commented on in the other novels in the primary material, particularly with regards to Harry Brooke in *He Who Whispers*, who I will analyze next. Essentially, some deviant people, notably the ones who belong in the society, will be able to mask their abnormalities and therefore go undetected, even within the comforting confines of the detective story. Secondly, the dichotomy of criminally deviant behavior having its roots in said behavior being found pleasurable by the deviant people; this is true not only of Molly and Gore who take great delight in what they are doing, as Gore himself confesses at the end of the novel, but also to some extent it is also true of the other deviant characters in the primary material. The sole exception to this rule is when the deviant behavior is brought on by disability or mental illness, as will become evident when such characters are analyzed further on. This pleasurability seems to be the sole motivation behind some of Molly’s deviant behavior, including her attempts at terrifying and terrorizing Farnleigh’s friend, Madeline, since no other concrete motive for doing so manifests itself in the novel.

A final point of interest with Molly is that, like the other abnormal female characters in the primary material, her abnormality is not necessarily detected by laypeople such as the Watsons, but it is always detected by other women. Madeline is questioned late into the novel whether or not she had any idea about Molly's deviant behavior, to which she replies that she guessed at it (165). This identification of female abnormality is in the primary material ascribed a Lombrosian quality, akin to how Pittard explained the concept: that criminality or abnormality are perceptible outwardly and it is a matter of natural human instinct and intuition that allows for this perceptibility to occur (Pittard, 114). Throughout the primary material, an instinctual response alerts other women about the true natures of the abnormal women – Molly, Fay and Margot – and, although it takes the efforts of Doctor Fell to truly pinpoint the exact true cause each time, these 'normal' women are able to tell that something is abnormal about the aforementioned trio. This matter will also be looked into further when Fay and Margot are discussed further on in this section.

*He Who Whispers* and *The Sleeping Sphinx*, published immediately following World War II, showcase the changing of attitudes towards abnormality in the decade following the publication of *The Crooked Hinge*; psychology and psychoanalytical answers are given more prominence than previously, and even the laypeople, such as the Watson-figures, are no longer disparaging towards psychology. Both of these novels also notably share almost exactly the same plot outline and outlook towards its abnormal characters: a deviant criminal, who is condemned for their criminality, and an abnormal female character who possesses a mental disability that causes deviant behavior, and who are subsequently treated with far more understanding and sympathy than prior to their true nature being explained.

The chief difference between these two novels lies in the way the archetypal role of victim is played out between the two abnormal women in the novels. In *He Who Whispers*, although Fay is targeted by the killer, she stays alive and is given partial opportunity to give her own perspective on things – although the extent to which she does so is quite limited – while in *The Sleeping Sphinx*,

Margot is already dead by the start of the novel, and her perspective is only explored through the tellings of Doctor Fell and her sister, Celia. Margot's own perspective is only seen in brief glimpses in the form of flashbacks and a love letter to the criminal that the Watson finds. Despite this rather limited angle of approach to giving actual voice to either of these women, both victims are, atypically for the subgenre, treated with considerable sympathy and understanding.

Another feature both novels share is that their criminals, Harry Brooke and Ronald Merrick, are virtually identical in their characteristics; they are members of society who have artistic aspirations, and who hide their true, nervous demeanor under a calm, peaceful exterior. Their most notable connection beyond the aforementioned aspects is the fact that they both commit their first murder by and large in a state of panicked frenzy, as Harry Brooke does, or in a state of panicked fear, as Ronald Merrick does. Their initial crime is unplanned and spontaneous, and only later, as the story progresses, do they begin to plan out what they are going to do to avoid being arrested and exposed. It is with the criminal of *He Who Whispers* that I continue the analysis.

Like Patrick Gore, Harry Brooke's past behavior is well known to the characters of the novel, but unlike Gore he was not considered actually deviant or ostracized by society in any way. Rather, his mood swings and brooding, hostile manner when he did not get his way or something went wrong for him were widely known. In fact, his public demeanor is one of the first aspects of his character that the reader learns:

‘This Harry interested me. He has sensitiveness, he has imagination. In height and weight and way of carrying himself he is much like his father. But under that correct outside of his, he is all wires and all nerves.

...

‘Harry is being trained in the leather business. He will inherit the factory one day; he will be a very rich man like his father. He is sensible; he knows his duty. And yet this boy wants to go to Paris and study painting.

...

‘My boy’, says the father, ‘I understand exactly how you feel. I went through a similar phase at your age. But in ten years’ time you will laugh at this.’

...

‘After which Harry goes out blindly and hits a tennis-ball so hard he blows his opponent off the court, or sits on the lawn with a white-faced, brooding, swearing look. These people are all so honest, so well-meaning, so thoroughly sincere!’ (HWW, 13–14)

Aside from his brooding temperament, a crucial idea about the deviant people in the Gideon Fell series is put forward here: namely that, in a manner of speaking, the deviant people never truly grow up or give up the behavior of their younger years or childhood. This idea was already evident with how little Patrick Gore had changed personality-wise from his childhood, but here this same aspect is considerably more self-evident: Harry’s obsession with becoming a painter is considered a phase he is going through by his father, and his response, bordering on a temper tantrum, is explicitly noted by Professor Rigaud, the man who is recounting Harry’s character to the Watson. Similar ideas about deviancy, when it is not connected to disability, is put forward later on in the series as well, most explicitly with Pennington Barclay from *The House at Satan’s Elbow*. This aspect will be further considered when Ronald Merrick and Pennington Barclay are analyzed further on in this section.

As previously mentioned, unlike Patrick Gore and Molly Farnleigh, Harry Brooke had very little plan for his initial crime; he, in fact, does not intend to murder his father, but rather lashes out at him when his original plan of ruining Fay Seton’s reputation fails upon his father’s discovery of Harry having planned the whole slandering campaign against her. His initial motivation is a childish hope that upon being asked by his parents to call off his engagement to Fay, they would permit his studying of painting:

‘So the scandal would gather, and Harry’s parents would beg him to break off the marriage. Harry would only look noble and refuse. The more he refused, the more frantic they would be. Finally he would be crushed, practically in tears, and he would say: “All right, I’ll give her up. But if I do consent to give her up, will you send me to Paris for two years to study painting so that I can forget her?”’

‘Would they have agreed *then*? Don’t we all know what families are? Of course they would have! They’d have seized at it in blessed relief.’ (130; italics original)

Only Harry’s father uncovering the truth about his son’s actions leads to his murder. When Howard Brooke refuses Harry’s plea to let him study painting for the last time, Harry, in a fit of violent temper, attacks him with his father’s sword-cane. Here it is curious to note that while a more conventional

motive for murder, such as the vast sum of money Howard Brooke was carrying in a briefcase with him at the time, is put forward initially by the French police as the motive, for the money goes missing, it is eventually revealed that it was Fay Seton who took the money rather than Harry Brooke. Fay's motive for doing so will be discussed shortly when Fay is analyzed. Harry, meanwhile, has no actual motive for the initial murder itself beyond pure, childish rage towards his father for the ruin of his plans, as Doctor Fell later explains, "“Harry saw the ruin of all his plans. He saw no soft life for himself now. And something snapped in his head. In a child's fury he snatched up the sword-stick, twisted it out of its scabbard, and stabbed his father through the back”" (168).

Harry's second, attempted, murder is by contrast a far more cold and calculated affair. Having by this time changed his name in the chaos surrounding the Fall of France to Stephen Curtis, Harry has settled into a post-war life of respectability. His brother-in-law, the Watson-figure Miles, and his fiancée, Marion, are not in the slightest aware of his true past or nature, although Marion does know about his brooding manner. When his path threatens to cross with Fay, who took the briefcase as insurance against Harry trying to have her arrested – for the briefcase contains evidence that would see Harry convicted of his father's murder – he plans to murder Fay in such a way so that it would seem as if she had died of fright. Fay – who is noted to have a weak heart in connection with her condition of hypersexuality – however, does not sleep in the upstairs bedroom that Marion has assigned her, and so switches bedrooms with Marion at the last minute, leading to Marion ending up the victim instead.

When Harry finds out from the Watson that the wrong woman has ended up the victim by accident, he launches right back into his tantruming mood, showing that he has not changed at all in the years since the murder of his father:

Stephen walked forward. Stephen, that self-controlled man, fastened sinewy fingers round the handle of his rolled umbrella; deliberately he lifted the umbrella high in the air; deliberately he brought it down with a smash on the edge of the table under the windows. The umbrella subsided, bent metal and broken ribs amid black cloth; a useless heap, an inanimate object that for some reason looked pitiful, like the body of a shot bird. (104)



This odd contrast of supposed self-control with deliberately breaking the umbrella, and how uncharacteristic this behavior is of the “Stephen” that Miles knows, is not consciously noticed or commented on by the Watson, although the implication of the oddness of his behavior is explicitly there for the reader to perceive. This is in keeping with the limiting of the Watsons’ intelligence as discussed previously. Yet it is curious that the broken umbrella is likened to a dead bird and pitied, with its broken ribs heightening this sense of animism. Thus, the reader is perhaps expected to take special note of Harry’s behavior, even when the Watson does not particularly comment on its oddity. Doctor Fell characterizes this particular instance in his summation near the end of the novel:

‘But do you remember what he did immediately afterwards? He deliberately lifted his umbrella, and very coolly and deliberately smashed it to flinders across the edge of the table. “Stephen Curtis” is supposed to be – pretends to be – a stolid kind of person. But that was Harry Brooke hitting the tennis-ball. That was Harry Brooke not getting what he wanted.’  
(179–180)

It bears remarking then that, like the other criminals in the primary material, Harry Brooke is able to easily blend in and remain unexposed until the end of the novel. Only occasional slips such as the aforementioned reveal his true nature to the detective figure, while the average person such as the Watson remains clueless as to the person the criminal really is. Owing to the fair-play mystery conventions of the subgenre, the criminal must always remain someone the Watson, with his limited intelligence, does not suspect. Thus, the Watson-figures may notice these slip ups in the mask of normality of the criminal figures, but will never extrapolate these slips into anything more; that role is for the infallible detective.

This subgeneric convention of successfully blending into society is commented on by Miles when it comes to Harry Brooke after Harry’s true nature has been exposed. Interestingly, the name “Harry Brooke” is at first used by the Watson in this instance as a catch-all term for all murderers:

‘The Harry Brookes of this world,’ said Miles, ‘always get away with it. Whether it’s luck, or circumstance, or some celestial gift in their own natures, I don’t pretend to guess. That fellow ought to have gone to the guillotine, or spent the rest of his life on Devil’s Island. Instead it’s

Fay Seton, who never did the least harm to anybody, who ...' His voice rose up. 'By God, I wish I could have met Harry Brooke six years ago! I'd give my soul to have a reckoning with him!' (173)

Immediately following this statement Doctor Fell grants the Watson-figure's wish of a confrontation with the criminal; the police have already arrested him, and moments later bring him inside for identification. Unlike Patrick Gore and Molly Farnleigh, who manage to escape any responsibility for John Farnleigh's murder, Harry Brooke is caught and brought to justice for the murder of his father, Howard Brooke, and the attempted murder of his fiancée, Marion Hammond. Furthermore, unlike the aforementioned Gore, and very much akin to the remaining criminals in the primary material, Harry Brooke is not given the chance to speak in his own defence following his criminality being exposed. In this manner it can be inferred that the reader is not encouraged to feel any kind of sympathy for him, only a kind of understanding as to why he committed the murders; the kind of person he is, the fact that he is somehow undeveloped as evidenced by the numerous references to his being akin to a child when the murders, their commission and his own character are described. While his attempted murder of Marion is described as a far more cold and calculated affair than the spontaneous killing of his father, his reaction to the ruin of his plans is depicted similarly to how he normally reacts when things do not go his way.

Ultimately, the tone taken with Harry Brooke, and the rest of the deviant individuals in the primary material, is universally condemning; while the notion that none of them have fully left their childhoods behind is very clearly established for all of them – save for Andrew Dawlish, the criminal of *The House at Satan's Elbow* – there is still a very real proposition of culpability evident for each and every one of them. They are in control over their own actions and are therefore also responsible for all of the evil actions they commit. This notion mostly concerns the criminals in the primary material, with one victim, Pennington Barclay of *The House at Satan's Elbow*, also presented in this manner. Of the remaining two abnormal characters who can be left out of this aforementioned classification, Fay Seton and Margot Marsh, both are suffering from mental impairments which bring

about their deviant behavior, and they are thus treated with far more understanding and sympathy; neither of the abnormal women is condemned or labeled deviant in the end, although their behavior is questioned before Doctor Fell explains matters, and exonerates them from the label of outright deviance. It is Fay Seton who shall be discussed next.

Fay Seton – like Molly Farnleigh and Margot Marsh, the other two abnormal women in the primary material – is at first able to conceal her abnormality. No one is aware of her hypersexuality<sup>3</sup>, called nymphomania at the time of the novel, before Doctor Fell explains her condition at the end of the novel, and when her abnormality shows on occasion, her resultant uncharacteristic behavior compared to how she is otherwise is attributed to the supernatural; her supposed vampirism. When she is introduced for the first time by Professor Rigaud in his retelling of the pre-war murder of Howard Brooke, she is described thusly:

‘Fay Seton was, in every sense of your term, a lady: though she seemed rather to conceal this and be frightened of it. . . . If they wanted a fourth at bridge, or someone to sing and play the piano when the lamps were lighted in the evening, Fay Seton would oblige. In her way she was friendly, though shy and somewhat prudish, and she would often sit looking into the distance, far away. And you thought to yourself, in exasperation: what *is* this girl thinking about? (15–16; italics original)

Her unobtrusive and aloof bearing is in stark contrast with how her hypersexuality compels her to behave, and also with how those around her perceive her when her abnormality influences her behavior. Yet Doctor Fell later firmly establishes that, “‘Fay Seton (don’t you see?) was emotionally the wrong kind of woman to have this quirk in her nature. Her outward Puritanism, her fastidiousness, her delicacy, her gentle manners, were *not* assumed. They are real’” (160; italics original). It is here that an interesting conflict between subjectivity, self-identity and social identity takes place: Fay’s self-identity – a self-controlled, calm and mild-mannered woman – is in direct opposition to how her

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<sup>3</sup> Levine and Troiden note that “Although the definitions of what constitutes sexual addiction and compulsion are ambiguous at present . . . mental health practitioners commonly use the terms to describe a ‘lack of control over erotic impulses’” (1988, 349). Under the definitions they cite, hypersexuality is noted to be either sexual addiction or compulsion.

condition is biologically influencing her demeanor and behavior, how she is constituted via subjectivity. Similarly, she is perceived as dangerous and deviant before her condition is explained, because her social identity is constructed by what others see of her, and thus more through her subjectivity than her self-identity.

Furthermore, Fell explains that while Fay herself is painfully aware of her condition, she attempts to do her best to fight it because, as he outright declares, “‘To have relations with casual strangers was and is torture to her. When she went out to France as Howard Brooke’s secretary in nineteen-thirty-nine, she was resolved to conquer this. . . . Her behavior at Chartres was irreproachable’” (ibid.). Thus, unlike either Molly, who derives enjoyment from her deviant behavior, or Margot, who does not seem to even realize she is any different from other people, Fay was trying to fight against the compulsions her condition forced upon her. Crucially, she was successful up until Harry Brooke began his campaign of slander against her, which made both the Brookes and the local French community shun her.

Interestingly, however, the reason for Fay being labeled deviant by the Brookes on one hand and by the local community on the other are vastly different, and betray surprisingly progressive views on sexuality held by the French in contrast to the British Brooke family:

‘Do you think it likely, young man,’ he [Rigaud] went on with a sort of pounce, ‘that a peasant farmer of Eure-et-Loir would care two sous, would care *that*,’ he snapped his fingers, ‘about a little affair of the passions between his son and a lady of the district? It would only amuse him, if in fact he noticed it at all. It would not, I assure you, start the thunder-storm which swept with terror every peasant in that district. It would not make Jules Fresnac throw a stone at the woman in a public road.’ (74; italics original)

‘. . . But Harry’s whispering campaign in the district almost failed completely. You know that French shrug of the shoulder, and the “*Et alors?*” Which just about corresponds to, “So what?” They were busy people; they had crops to harvest; such things harmed no one if they didn’t interfere with work; so what?’

‘. . . Harry knew, of course, that his father wouldn’t believe any nonsense about vampires. Harry didn’t want his father to believe that. What Mr Brooke would hear, what he couldn’t help hearing in every corner round Chartres, was a story about his son’s fiancée visiting Pierre Fresnac so often at night, and . . . [sic] all the rest of it. That would be enough. That would be more than enough.’ (130–131; italics original)

Fay's hypersexuality is apparently of no real consequence to the pre-war French people. Indeed, if she had not managed to blend in at all, it would not have caused her to be shunned by the locals in the least; her hypersexual behavior is, while perhaps not the norm, not considered deviant behavior in the French community depicted. Meanwhile, the British upper-class Brooke family, carrying the values of British society of the time, immediately label her deviant when rumours of her behavior surface. This implies that the condition would not have prevented Fay from being considered a normal member of the community in France, while the same would not have been true in Britain. As earlier proven by the quote from Doctor Fell, this seems to have been the case as Fay felt she had to conquer her condition. Critics M. P. Levine and R. R. Troiden, placing hypersexuality under the heading of sexual addiction or compulsion, are largely in agreement with this point of social context being a deciding factor:

The diagnosis of sexual addiction or compulsion rests on culturally induced perceptions of what constitutes sexual impulse control. Perceptions of control over erotic impulses, however, are social constructions. Definitions of "controlled" and "uncontrolled" sexuality are cultural inventions specific to particular societies at particular times. In any given society, sexual scripts provide the standards determining erotic control and normalcy. What one society regards as being sexually "out of control" or deviant, may or may not be viewed as such by another. (1988, 351)

They further point out that conditions such as hypersexuality were considered psychosexual disorders at the time period of the novel's publication: "The first edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM: I, 1952), for example, defined . . . sexual promiscuity (e.g. 'Don Juanism' and 'Nymphomania') as forms of mental illness" (353). While hypersexuality was removed from the DSM in the 1980s, this came about because of societal changes and against the backdrop of the sexual liberation of the 1960s and 1970s (ibid.), which makes the French perspective of indifference towards Fay's hypersexuality in the novel quite modern for its day.

Throughout the novel, before Fay's condition is explained, her odd behavior is described by the Watson as akin to monstrosity; her supposed vampiric nature leads the Watson, who adamantly

claims not to believe in such things, to narrate her appearance and demeanor in such a way as to make her motivations and words be easily misidentified as evil. Even Lombrosian inclinations of instinctual recognition of abnormality are brought forward about her; when her photograph is produced by Professor Rigaud for Miles, as he is recounting the Howard Brooke murder case, the Watson is clearly troubled by the photograph: “It was not beautiful. Yet it troubled the mind. Something about the eyes – was it irony, was it bitterness under the far-away expression? – at once challenged you and fled from you.” (*HWW*, 19). When Miles is then asked to voice his opinion, he admits to finding the photograph haunting in some way:

‘There’s a kind of spell about it,’ said Miles, brushing his hand across his forehead. ‘The eyes there in that picture! And the way she’s got her head turned. Confound the photograph!’  
 He, Miles Hammond, was a tired man only recently recovered from a very long illness. He wanted peace. He wanted to live in seclusion in the New Forest, among old books, with his sister to keep house for him until her marriage. He didn’t want to have his imagination stirred. Yet he sat staring at the photograph, staring at it under the candle-light until its subtle colours grew blurred, while Professor Rigaud went on. (21)

Descriptions of Fay, such as the following, take on a more sinister tone when Miles’s sister, Marion, is almost frightened to death. Since no sign of any intruder is found, Miles is initially forced to assume that Fay is responsible, and so Professor Rigaud’s earlier insinuations that Fay is a vampire manage to gain a foothold in the Watson’s mind. Fairly rapidly, however, Doctor Fell’s assurances that nothing supernatural is going on, and that Fay is innocent of any crime, dispel all notion of her being a monster from the narration. While her behavior still puzzles the Watson-figure, there no longer remains any indication that she is evil in the least. Doctor Fell’s comforting and reassuring, infallible words are enough to make everyone discard any notion of monstrosity, but her supposed supernatural nature is not the only Lombrosian aspect about her in the narrative.

As discussed earlier with regards to Molly Farnleigh, other women in the Gideon Fell series are able to instinctively pick up on female abnormality, no matter whether it is deviance or disability, though they will not necessarily identify what the abnormality is exactly. This becomes evident when Barbara Morell’s first reaction to meeting Fay in person is noticed by the Watson:

Miles took a step or two away from her. He bumped into Barbara, who also moved back. For a fraction of a second, as Barbara's head turned, he surprised on Barbara's face a look which completed his demoralization.

Barbara's eyes had been fixed steadily on Fay for some time. In her eyes, slowly growing, was an expression of wonder; and of something else which was not dislike, but very near dislike. (148–149)

This idea is later confirmed as exactly what is going on by Doctor Fell in his summation of Fay's condition, though Fell expands this instinctive recognition to include men as well:

'Do you begin to understand now? The atmosphere which always surrounded her was an air of ... [sic] well, look into your own memory! It went with her. It haunted her. It clung round her. *That* was the quality which touched and troubled everywhere the people with whom she came in contact, even though they did not understand it. It was a quality sensed by nearly all men. It was a quality sensed, and bitterly resented, by nearly all women.' (160; italics original)

The idea that nearly everyone could sense that something was abnormal about her, as described by Fell, is evidenced right from the first by the reaction Miles had to her photograph even before he knew anything about her, and is confirmed further by both Miles's narration of her demeanor throughout the novel and Barbara's first instinctual reaction to meeting her. Barbara's reaction, although perhaps odd at first, can be understood to be a form of resentment towards a more uninhibited woman: a similar reaction can be seen from Doris Locke towards the deceased Margot Marsh in *The Sleeping Sphinx*, when Doris alludes to knowing about Margot's extramarital affair with an unknown party.

However, unlike all of the other abnormal characters before, the ultimate reaction to her following the exposing of her true nature is one of understanding, sympathy and inclusion. This is because, I claim, her condition is considered akin to a disability, and it is treated as an impairment; her condition prevents her from being a full member of British society, and she cannot blend in. She is noted to be conspicuous on multiple occasions, most notably by Fell himself. Furthermore, her hypersexuality is said to be a compulsion that she cannot fight, although she tries, as Doctor Fell explains:

‘Behold now,’ said Dr Fell, rounding the syllables with thunderous emphasis, ‘an explanation which will presently fit so many puzzling factors in this affair. Fay Seton *had* to have men. I wish to put this matter with delicacy, so I will merely refer you to the psychologists. But it is a form of psychic illness which has tortured her since youth.

‘She is no more to be blamed for it than for the heart-weakness which accompanied it. In women so constituted – there are not a great number of them, but they do appear in the consulting rooms – the result does not always end in actual disaster.’ (160; italics original)

A certain hint of this is given from her own perspective, while being questioned by Superintendent Hadley, when asked if she refuses to answer questions, she says, “‘Do I ever – refuse?’” (147). Notably, Fell later admits that he did not know about her condition with certainty until Fay told him herself. Finally, her condition is noted to be almost assuredly fatal by Fell owing to the heart condition associated with it, and Fell states that Fay will at most live a few months. Despite all of these aspects about her condition, at the very end of the novel, the Watson-figure goes out of his way to attempt to be together with Fay. The Watson’s perspective is markedly contrasted with Barbara Morell, a ‘normal woman’, attempting to dissuade him from doing so:

‘I’m going to her,’ he said.

There was a sharp scraping noise on the carpet as Barbara Morell pushed her chair back. Barbara’s eyes were opened wide.

‘*Miles don’t be a fool!*’

...

Barbara Morell – sincere, sympathetic, advising him for his own good as Marion did – let her voice rise to a small scream.

‘Miles, it’s silly! Think what she *is!*’

‘I don’t give a curse what she is,’ he said. ‘I’m going to her.’ (192; italics original)

While this ending does leave what ultimately happens to Fay and Miles ambiguous, Miles’s position as a relatable Watson-figure will very easily lead to the conclusion that the reader is meant to take Miles’s side in this debate, and see Fay, and women like her, as someone not to be shunned or condemned. This perspective is further strengthened when the sympathetic words in Fell’s diagnosis are taken into account, and Fay is contrasted with Margot Marsh, a similar woman in *The Sleeping Sphinx* which was published immediately following the publication of *He Who Whispers*, who is treated in a similar manner. Ultimately, however, nearly twenty years later, Carr returned to this uncertain resolution briefly in *Panic in Box C* from 1966, where Fay is mentioned and referred to as



‘Fay Hammond’, showing that she is both alive and well and that she has married Miles; proving, at the very least, that no further disaster struck her after she married the Watson-figure of her story, and, most importantly, showing her as an accepted member of society. This mention, although brief and taking place years after the publication of *He Who Whispers*, is a confirmation of the fact that the reader is meant to both sympathise with Fay, and accept Miles’s decision to marry her as a reasonable course of action.

Margot Marsh, the last of the three abnormal women in the primary material, while treated in a similar fashion to Fay once her true nature is revealed, does not receive the same ostensibly happy ending as Fay does, because she is long dead by the time her story begins. Throughout the narrative of *The Sleeping Sphinx*, Margot is compared and contrasted with her sister, Celia, a ‘normal woman’. However, in an interesting reversal, for most of the narrative Margot is considered to have been normal, while Celia is considered abnormal; the family physician, Doctor Shepton, suspects she suffers from nervous hysteria, while at the same time refusing to disclose to anyone that Margot suffered from sexual hysteria.<sup>4</sup> Joshi notes of the novel itself that “Much of the tragic confusion in this work is caused by an old family doctor’s fanatical desire to avoid scandal, to the point that he tries to convince a young woman that she may be insane” (96). This desire to avoid scandal is not limited to Doctor Shepton alone, for other characters who know of the family history of hysteria – Margot’s husband Thorley, Thorley’s mentor Derek Hurst-Gore, and Margot and Celia’s grandmother Mammy Two – all stay by and large silent about Margot’s condition. Only Mammy Two briefly confides in Donald in a flashback scene – because of the Watson-figure’s inherent trustworthiness – but even then she remains vague and cryptic in her wording:

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<sup>4</sup> In her book, Judith Herman briefly discusses the problems faced in defining hysteria in women: “For two decades in the late nineteenth century, the disorder called hysteria became a major focus of serious inquiry. The term *hysteria* was so commonly understood at the time that no one had actually taken the trouble to define it systematically” (1992, 10; italics original). She continues by positing that Freud’s initial findings of hysteria as having its roots in past sexual trauma in women were very soon rejected even by Freud himself, and that the dominant psychological theories of the next century were founded on the denial of women’s reality (13–14).

“Die?” said Mammy Two. “Well, my dear child, I only hope when my time comes they’ll have finished the new vault in Caswall churchyard. The old one is so crowded it’s a sin and a shame.” Her old eyes, pale blue in a white face, hardened and grew apprehensive. “But I don’t want to die yet. I’ve got to look out for – things.”

“Things?”

“There’s a funny streak in our family, y’know. One of my granddaughters is all right, but I’ve been worried about the other ever since she was a little child. No, I don’t want to be taken yet.” (SS, 14)

This cryptic wording leads Donald to mistakenly believe that Mammy Two is referring to Celia rather than Margot. As Mammy Two dies some years before the novel begins – and the remaining people who know of Margot’s true nature do not wish anyone else to find out – no one corrects Donald’s incorrect assumption. While Donald never openly admits to seriously thinking that Celia could have mental health problems, he is burdened by the worry that it could be true, and is openly relieved when Fell confirms Celia’s sanity to him. In light of all this, everything the Watson-figure knows and tells about Margot and Celia is filtered through this misconception until the truth is exposed; all of Margot’s behavior is characterized as “healthy”, “full of life” or “overhearty”, while the Watson characterizes Celia as “excitable”, and at times “eerie” whenever there is any indication that she is behaving strangely.

While suspicions of Celia’s nervous hysteria – which are brought on by her lying about seeing ghosts on the night of Margot’s murder in order to force the police into exhuming Margot’s body, and investigating her true cause of death – are openly known by every major character in the story, Margot’s sexual hysteria is only completely uncovered when Doctor Fell begins discussing the motivations behind both Margot’s actions, and Ronald Merrick’s plan to kill her. Disproportionally, in a manner of speaking, prominence in the narrative is then given to disproving the notion that Celia has hysteria of any kind, while actual understanding and sympathy for Margot only arrive near the very end of the novel at Fell’s summation. This is understandable, as Margot is considered by most everyone, aside from the few people who know of her condition, to have been mentally completely normal. Her adultery, meanwhile, is explicitly known by Doris Locke, the lover of Margot’s husband Thorley, as she indicates at the end of a discussion she has with the Watson in private:

“... And, what’s more, tonight I’m going to end it.”

“End what?”

“You’ll see,” answered Doris, nodding her head in a meaning fashion. “There are certain secrets about certain people, and maybe dead people as well, that ought to have an airing. And they’re going to get one.” (65)

Doris knowing about Margot’s extramarital affair is connected to the earlier discussed idea of other women detecting female abnormality in the series, for later it is discovered that no one has told Doris about the affair and that she came to the conclusion on her own. This is further confirmed by her being completely unaware of Ronald Merrick being the other party, as she later admits after his actions are exposed. Unlike with the other abnormal women, the question of whether any woman intuitively perceived Margot’s actual true nature as a hysteric is kept unclear; while Mammy Two does say that she has been worried about Margot since she was a small child, whether this was due to intuition or medical diagnosis – as it is indicated that Doctor Shepton has been the family physician for a long time – is left unstated.

Lastly, as regards Margot’s extramarital affair, a curious parallel exists between two pairs in the narrative, where both pairs are or were having an affair: Margot and Ronald on one hand, and Thorley and Doris on the other one. While both Margot and Thorley are attacked by Ronald, only Thorley survives. When both affairs – though not the fact that Ronald was Margot’s lover – are exposed, the sympathies of the Watson-figure lie with Margot in the sense that, while Margot’s affair is not considered socially appropriate, she is not outright condemned by Donald either. Thorley’s affair, meanwhile, is condemned more harshly. The most condemning voice towards Margot comes from Doris, who is having an affair herself:

“That Woman,” she gave Margot the capital letters of sheer hatred, “That Woman was so intolerably prudish . . . and she’d never done anything like that before . . . that she was terribly, terribly secret about it. You’d have thought it was an awful sin or something. She was wild about him toward the end, though, whoever he was. Absolutely *wild*. You could see the signs.” (76; italics original)

Doris indicates quite clearly that it was outwardly perceivable what Margot was doing, but that she still attempted to maintain a public façade of respectability, since adultery, as was noted by Grella (42) in the theory section using Margot as a direct example, is a serious offense in the upper-class society depicted in the subgenre. Despite this, other characters are more lenient and sympathetic in their reactions to the news: Celia, for example, was more than happy that Margot had apparently found someone else since she believed Thorley abused her sister. As noted earlier, Donald is sympathetic, but comes to view Margot's affair as a mistake, but not for the reasons one might initially assume to be the case, for Fell and Donald later discover that Margot's lover, Ronald Merrick, was also her murderer. Margot's murder is also said to be not her own fault at all, but rather Merrick's childish personality and fears of social disgrace were the affair to be discovered. It is outright stated that the situation would have been unlikely to lead into tragedy were it not for Merrick.

A further curious issue regarding Margot's abnormality is that, owing to the muddled nature of defining what hysteria exactly is, Margot's condition and its supposed effects are analyzed by Fell in considerably more detail than Fay Seton's hypersexuality and its characteristics previously were. This is connected with Fell's role as a filler of gaps in scientific knowledge, for there can be no uncertainty in the detective's diagnosis in the subgenre, and leaving Margot's condition undefined under a label such as hysteria – which has subsequently been discredited but was at the time an ill-defined yet credible diagnosis (Stone et al 2008, 12–13) – would have failed to fulfill both this role and that of the detective as a figure of infallible authority. Fell offers a definition of sexual hysteria that works only because in the subgenre and the confines of its rules people's behavior can be accurately predicted and modelled; the earlier presented idea of Howe's (15–16) about the subgenre's characters operating under a "logical algebra", where a certain type of person will always behave in exactly predictable patterns in any given circumstance is exactly what allows Fell's diagnosis and definition to be absolutely true in the world of the narrative.

This leads to a definition of hysteria which shares a few notable characteristics with the definition of hypersexuality that was used earlier in the series: that the abnormal woman cannot help their own nature, and that they are in a sense trapped by their condition – the condition is treated as an impairment or disability. The vital difference between Margot and Fay seems to come down to the fact that – due to her family’s need to maintain the condition a secret from outsiders to avoid scandal – Margot herself is apparently not aware she that is any different from anybody else, while Fay is painfully aware and conscious of her own condition. Describing the typical sufferer of sexual hysteria as both a pathological liar and as potentially delusional, Doctor Fell gives the following definition of Margot’s condition:

“There, . . ., walked Margot Devereux. And how the world misunderstood!  
 “Because she was robust, because she was jovial, because she liked games, they laughed and approved and applauded.’Strapping,’ they called her. ‘Uninhibited,’ was another word. . . .”  
 (SS, 172)

“I will not,” scowled Dr. Fell, “discuss the various physical causes which may bring about hysteria. Except to say this: that the hysteric becomes dominated by a fixed idea. She believes, let us say, that she is blind. To all intents and purposes, she *is* blind.  
 “In a case like Margot Devereux, it is plain that to marry almost any man would be dangerous. . . . For its root is sexual.  
 “Once married, she discovers (or thinks she discovers which is the same thing) that physical intimacy with her husband is a matter of horror. She screams when he approaches her. His mere touch is nausea. . . . And this may go on for years. And nobody ever knows.” (173; italics original)

By defining Margot’s condition very thoroughly in some respects, the narrative offers certainty, and yet at the same time Doctor Fell’s refusal to address the root causes of hysteria in women reveals the uncertainty that was also evident in the definitions of the condition offered at the time as Herman explained (13–14). By leaving the question of the root cause of the condition completely unanswered, the novel deliberately refuses the role of infallibility it otherwise assumes in answering and defining abnormality not only in the case of hysteria but also other conditions previously discussed such as hypersexuality. In matters where there was any doubt as to the certainty of the answer in reality at the time of publication, the narrative refuses to take a stance. Margot’s condition is most clearly defined

as concerns the motives relating to her murder, while the root causes of her condition are of no apparent consequence to the mystery aspect of the narrative, and are also left unexplored by Doctor Fell.

Although it is never touched upon directly in Fell's summation or elsewhere in the narrative, flashbacks reveal that Margot herself was not told of her own condition. Thus, unlike Fay or Molly, the reader never gets her own perspective on the matter of her true nature, because she is not aware she is any different from any other woman or has anything to hide. Therefore she also shows her true nature at all times, but other people do not see her behavior for what it is defined to represent in the world of the narrative. Margot blends into society without being aware of it, similarly to John Farnleigh, but where Farnleigh at the very least doubts and worries over his true nature and is not sure of anything, Margot never questions. Her death is brought on by her family and physician actively refusing to disclose her condition to both her and her sister, leading to her unhappy marriage with Thorley, which in turn lead to her affair with her murderer. Doctor Fell even calls Doctor Shepton out on his adamant refusal to reveal Margot's condition openly to anyone as one of the key elements that lead to her death, though Shepton refuses to accept responsibility in the end: "'You talk,' cried Dr. Shepton, 'as though—' He stopped. 'Prosecution!' he added." (SS, 177). Although Fell immediately thereafter absolves him of any willful wrongdoing in the matter, as the detective readily admits that Shepton did not make the decision alone, and that he was misled into believing that Celia was a hysteric as well by her lying.

A final matter of importance as regards Margot's true nature is that, similarly to Fay Seton, Margot is deeply connected with the supposed supernatural aspect of her story: in a manner of speaking, she is the titular sleeping sphinx. Before the summation Doctor Fell tells Donald that a ring of a sphinx that Fell possesses is deeply connected to the case with what the design of a sphinx symbolizes (133). Although Fell is unable to disclose what this symbolism exactly is at that time, a

sphinx statuette is later found by Donald in Margot's private office with an inscription that explicitly reveals the intended symbolism:

Here is a sleeping sphinx. She is dreaming of the *Parabrahm* [sic], of the universe and the destiny of man. She is part human, representing the higher principle, and part beast, as representing the lower. She also symbolizes the two selves: the outer self which all the world may see, and the inner self which may be known to few. (160; italics original)

Margot's true nature is shortly thereafter defined in similar terms: although the world was able to see her outer self as she really was, only a select few knew what her behavior meant and could cause. Her reaction to her husband Thorley after they were married was kept secret for fear of scandal in addition to what was the condition that caused it. The connection and comparison to a mythological creature that is partly human and partly animal is also made evident by Doris's description of Margot covering up her affair with Ronald Merrick quoted earlier, where Doris found her prudish, whereas otherwise she was characterized as uninhibited and overhearted by those around her.

All three abnormal women in the primary material – Molly, Fay and Margot – are aware that they need to maintain outwardly a position of respectability, but where for Fay it was how she wanted to behave, Molly and Margot covered up their deviations: the witch cult for Molly and her extramarital affair for Margot. Where Molly and Margot then crucially differ is that it is indicated that Margot begged her husband, Thorley, for a divorce in order to be able to marry Ronald, whereas Molly had no intention of attempting to change what she was doing into something socially acceptable.

This focus on psychosexual conditions and abnormality in women evident in Carr is reflective of a similar interest in society in the mid to late 1940s as described in Whiting's article in the theory section. As Whiting writes of the new ideas about explaining human behavior in the immediate post-war world, "Crucial to this revision . . . was a notion . . . namely, the primacy of sexual desire in explaining human behavior" (150). This notion prevalent at the time is reflected in the need for Fell to thoroughly explain the behaviors of both Fay Seton in *He Who Whispers* and Margot Marsh in *The*

*Sleeping Sphinx*, but the crucial difference from the typical use of sexuality in post-war detective writing as described by Whiting is that Carr's use of it is not to use it to explain criminal behavior, but the behavior of the female victims in the narratives published in that time period. Where other writers used sexual desires to explain new types of killer emerging, for example the serial killer, Carr used the same phenomena but instead applied them to characters who are then portrayed sympathetically, in itself something that was typically not done in the subgenre as concerns archetypal "victim" characters.

Ronald Merrick, the criminal in *The Sleeping Sphinx*, continues the direct parallels that can be drawn between *He Who Whispers* and *The Sleeping Sphinx*: in nearly every respect he is a carbon copy of Harry Brooke. They are both young men from rich backgrounds with artistic aspirations, but where Harry was the son of a rich industrialist, Ronald is the son of a nobleman. Ronald's artistic aspirations, unlike Harry's, are looked upon more favorably by society, although the reader is never told what his own family thinks of the matter, his future in-laws never comment on the matter negatively, and his future father-in-law even considers him a genius. Grella analyzes Ronald Merrick in the following manner:

Ronald Merrick of Carr's *The Sleeping Sphinx*, appears at first an unlikely murderer, since he conforms to the social ethic. After all, how can a cleancut, athletic, public school graduate who wears the approved rustic uniform – disreputable tweeds – be guilty of bad form? But Ronald is a rotter, as his artistic talents indicate and his adulterous affair with his victim confirms. Though his crime rids society of one sinner, normality returns only with his own, obviously well-deserved, removal. (44; italics original)

As was noted earlier when the Watson-figures were analyzed, the Watson of the story, Donald Holden, is unable to perceive anything wrong in Merrick. Ronald's social identity seems to fit with what is expected of him. Like the other criminals, aside from Patrick Gore, he fits into society at least superficially. As was explained by Plain (11–12) in the theory section, in this subgenre the criminal must not be someone the reader would immediately suspect of being a criminal and this is achieved partially via the earlier discussed aspect of the Watson-figure being a poor judge of character: the



Watson-figures will never outright recognize criminal abnormality, since this role is left for the infallible detective figure. In the case of Ronald Merrick and Donald Holden, moments prior to going up to meet him for the first time, Donald overhears Ronald having a panic attack that he then pretends to not have witnessed, and rather than question the man about it, Donald forgets the whole incident ever happened or that it was in any way significant. When Fell in his summation notes Ronald's nervous and childish nature, he needs to remind the Watson-figure of the incident.

As with Harry Brooke, Ronald Merrick is described as someone not fully grown up, an adult physically but not mentally. When Celia requests that Fell provides "the human motives" (SS, 187) for why Merrick murdered her sister, Fell focuses his analysis of Merrick's true nature on his youth and immaturity: "'Merrick,' said Dr. Fell, 'was the vain, spoiled, unstable son of an eminent peer. He was too young, psychologically speaking, to realize quite what he was doing. But the law can take no cognizance of that.'" (183). In many respects Ronald's deviance is said to be brought forth by his having never truly grown up, this is connected by Fell to be his reason for beginning the affair with Margot, his inability to extricate himself from the affair, and the ultimate reason for why he murdered Margot:

"Youth, when frightened, can become insensately cruel. Merrick, as I met him later at Widestairs, was a likeable sort. But he was jumpy, unsteady (surely you saw that for yourself?) and blind to the matter in its right perspective. Like many another young man in a love affair from which he hasn't the experience to extricate himself, he could see only one way. He lost his head and decided to kill her." (189)

His decision to murder Margot is remarkably similar to Harry Brooke's plan to kill Fay Seton: the fear of being exposed for what they truly are – a murderer in Brooke's case, and an adulterer in Merrick's – drives them into committing murder. Unlike Harry Brooke's attempted murder, Merrick has considerable time to plan out his crime and the way it is committed, but the underlying motivation remains the same in both narratives. While Fell's analysis would seem to indicate that any young man in a similar situation could be capable of murder and would resolve to go through with it, this is contradicted by the other pieces of Fell's character analysis of Merrick: his immaturity, similarly to

Harry Brooke, is treated as something abnormal, akin to mental illness which leads to his deviant behavior, though unlike either Margot or Fay distinctly not a disability or an impairment: he is able to function as nondisabled in society, and is treated as normal.

While his character, therefore, is a near complete rehashing of Harry Brooke's character, it does raise an interesting point. As with the repetition of a woman who is considered somehow psychosexually abnormal, both stories feature a criminal who have not mentally reached adulthood or who are somehow mentally unstable: where "neurotic" is used to describe Harry Brooke, "unstable" is ascribed to Ronald Merrick. As I brought up before, while it was typical of detective fiction in the 1940s to explore psychosexual themes, the way these themes are handled in Carr's writing of the time period is atypical: where typically the criminals were the ones afflicted with psychosexual abnormality, here the victims are the ones whose conditions are psychosexual in nature. Although this means that Carr's writing does not conform to what other writers of the period were writing in the subgenre at the time, his work addresses similar societal anxieties but from another, more sympathetic angle. Instead of seeing psychosexual conditions as something that leads to crime or criminality, these are presented as conditions that the people suffering from them have to combat in some manner in order to fit in: the people so afflicted are presented as people in need of understanding and help, not as people to be feared or shunned, which would be the case were they presented in the archetypal role of the criminal.

The criminal of this time period meanwhile, while not psychosexually abnormal, is treated in a manner akin to how criminality was treated in other works of the subgenre: as deviant individuals whose motives for murder and crime could be understood and perhaps predicted through the application of psychology and psychoanalysis. The prominence of psychology, although somewhat evident already by the time of *The Crooked Hinge* in 1938, continued to be a significant influence in Gideon Fell stories up to the publication of the last novels in the 1960s. *The House at Satan's Elbow* from 1965 features two characters – Andrew Dawlish, the criminal, and Pennington Barclay, the

victim – whose motivations are analyzed through psychology in particular. The main difference here being that similar anxieties relating to sexuality are no longer evident, as psychosexual disorders or abnormalities are no longer present in this story or the others in the series published at the time.

Andrew Dawlish, in stark contrast to his neurotic victim, is a calm and collected solicitor. When he is first introduced he is described by the Watson as appearing to have the likeness of the portraits of Lord Thomas Macauley, a stern 19th century Whig politician, and his countenance supports this assertion. Unlike the prior criminals of Gore, Brooke and Merrick, throughout the narrative Dawlish remains calm, collected and cold no matter the circumstances. The only time he shows any emotion is when he the Watson briefly spies him admiring himself in a mirror – a trait that Doctor Fell later connects with Dawlish's true nature as a narcissistic and extremely vain man – and when Dawlish talks with Pennington Barclay's wife, Deidre Barclay, who Fell later ascertains that Dawlish is in love with. The latter is mostly evidenced throughout the narrative where Dawlish's reactions to Deidre's words and the words of others are concerned: when Pennington's deceased, abusive father, Old Clovis, is denounced by several members of the family, including Deidre, Dawlish chides them all for it, save Deidre. Whenever the Watson-figure, Garrett, notices these instances, he characterizes Dawlish as very protective of Deidre, even at one time describing Dawlish's tone of voice with her as akin to "spread[ing] protective wings" (*HSE*, 61).

As with the other archetypal criminals bar Gore, Dawlish blends into society without any great difficulty due to his respected position as the Barclay family solicitor. His position allows him access to both his victim and Deidre, who both trust him explicitly and confide in him. This is evidenced when Fell describes how Dawlish came to know about Garrett's love interest's possible past dealings with the law, "In terms of strictest confidence she [Deidre] would ask Andrew Dawlish: the man of law, the man whose profession it is to keep secrets, the one man on earth she absolutely trusted." (215). This is also how Dawlish is able to discover Pennington Barclay's neurotic and depressed nature and suicidal tendencies, in addition to how he is able to influence Pennington gradually into

attempting suicide: he is a trusted member of the community, and in a profession that instills confidence in his clients. Dawlish's motives for attempting to drive his client to kill himself, Doctor Fell describes as motivated by "both sex and the greed for money" (177); Dawlish's lust for Deidre and a desire to marry her for Pennington's wealth. Where this possibly could be interpreted to indicate a psychosexual motive on Dawlish's part, a greater weight is ultimately put on Pennington's inherited wealth in terms of explaining what motivates Dawlish; as Doctor Fell does not elaborate further on any possible deeper psychological meanings beyond a base feeling of lust for Deidre, which would compel Dawlish to act in a criminally deviant manner, it cannot be concluded that he is psychosexually abnormal in any way.

Curiously, where Fell later characterizes Pennington's role in the mystery as "the Peter Pan element – childish and rather ugly, though not criminal" (190), Dawlish's deviant nature Fell, in the same sentence, describes as "the Captain Hook element – also childish, but more adult and most viciously clever" (ibid.). Throughout his summation Doctor Fell in a way intones that the deviance implied by Pennington terrorizing his family and servants by play-acting a ghost is somehow mitigated by the more criminal deviance displayed by Dawlish, although Fell notes that the two elements in the murder case are not directly connected – for neither man was aware of the deviant behavior of the other. However, this is not an exculpation of Pennington, and while Dawlish is condemned in far harsher words, there is very little sympathy for Pennington to be found either for his deviant behavior. Then, as Fell explains of Dawlish's character, Dawlish, in a manner similar to Pennington, presents a false face to the world – a stoic, no nonsense solicitor – while in truth there is another man underneath which Fell notes to be very similar in nature to that of his victim (204–205), in part explaining the Peter Pan and Captain Hook comparison: both men are noted to be deviant, but their exact deviant behavior is quite different. Dawlish's extremely vain and narcissistic character is said by Fell to be what allowed him to fall into criminality when the temptation presented itself (205),

while Pennington, who will be analyzed next, is not criminally deviant, but still deviant in that his actions are for his own pleasure and benefit at the expense of people he does not like.

Therefore, of far greater importance in this final novel than Dawlish himself is his victim – Pennington Barclay. Like Patrick Gore and Molly Farnleigh, the reader is given a very thorough examination of his whole life, but where with the aforementioned two figures the examination focused on their childhoods, Pennington's adult life is examined more closely as well prior to the revelation of his true deviant nature. Unlike either Patrick or Molly – who are both from similar privileged backgrounds as Pennington, but were happy themselves – Pennington's childhood and early adulthood were spent under the domineering and mentally abusive rule of his father, Old Clovis, who is said to have also heaped abuse on Pennington's older brother and younger sister. Where his brother openly quarreled with Clovis and eventually left Greengrove, their home estate, after having endured too much – and his sister adored their father, despite Clovis apparently never showing any affection for her – Pennington is said to have silently endured the mental abuse of his father. But where his siblings found other ways of coping with their father's behavior, Pennington's method of coping was to dress up as the black veiled ghost said to haunt Greengrove and to appear to people he felt had wronged him: at first, as a young man to Clovis, and later, as the story begins, he appears as the ghost to his sister, Estelle, and his cook Mrs Tiffin.

What is interesting to discover is that when Doctor Fell explains Pennington's embittered and brooding state of mind that drove him to perform the role of the ghost, the reactions of those hearing the explanation is to immediately assume that Pennington is insane or otherwise mentally unstable. As a family history of mental instability has been noted earlier in the story, and Pennington's rather childish nature similar to Harry Brooke and Ronald Merrick has also been exposed, this is not an unlikely reaction. However, Fell immediately denies that Pennington is insane at all, and that he is fully aware of what he is doing, Fell even notes that Pennington – who survives the attempt on his life – is stricken with remorse over his actions, which is ultimately what leads to his actions not being

condemned quite as harshly as the other deviant figures in the other analyzed novels in the Gideon Fell series are. It must also be remarked upon that while Fell is both understanding and somewhat sympathetic, neither is in evidence with the other characters when they hear Fell's account of Pennington's masquerade as the ghost:

'Oh, have it your own way! But what happened all those years ago is one thing; what happened this year is quite another. Mr Barclay, of all people, carrying on like a boy playing pranks in a deserted house?'

'Just that.'

'A man of his age? It's grotesque and silly! And, whatever else you say, a civilized man too?' (195)

While Fell does explain that everyone has the capacity to commit acts such as the masquerade of a ghost that Pennington did, he notes that only the combination of Pennington's depressed and brooding state of mind – distinctly noted to not be insanity, however – and Dawlish "pouring poison into his ear" (196) – namely the false threat of Pennington being dispossessed by his nephew, the new heir – that ultimately leads to his play-acting a ghost and attempted suicide. Notably, Garrett, the Watson-figure, remains mostly silent throughout these exchanges between various members of the household and Doctor Fell during the summation, and does not appear to take sides in the debate to what extent Pennington's behavior is condemnable. What is evident, however, is that Pennington's behavior is considered abnormal and unacceptable by everyone, including Fell who is the most understanding of his circumstances. His archetypal role of as a victim in the fair-play whodunit subgenre seems to be what spares him from the full measure of condemnation, as he not only survives, and – unlike Molly or Patrick who both likewise derive enjoyment from their behavior – actively regrets and is remorseful over his deviant behavior.

Pennington then stands apart from the other deviantly abnormal figures analyzed in not being entirely condemned as a deviant social confuser, but neither is he classed among those whose deviance is due to disability such as Farnleigh with his amnesia or Fay with her hypersexuality. The only aspect about his character that could perhaps be considered indicative of disability or impairment

is when his secretary, Garrett's love interest, confides in him that she believes that he is a hypochondriac and that there is really nothing seriously wrong with him (116). An inclination of this is further given by the fact that Pennington has hired a private physician to look after his health and to monitor his supposed heart condition. However, as Doctor Fell never connects this alluded condition to any of Pennington's deviant behavior, indeed the condition remains unmentioned in his summation, it cannot be conclusively proven that the reader is supposed to take this factor into serious consideration when deciding whether to perceive Pennington as a disabled or a deviant individual.

#### 4. Conclusions

Over the course of this thesis I have striven to prove that the Gideon Fell novels were taking part in a discourse over normality and abnormality in English society during the decades the series was published in – a period stretching from the 1930s to the 1960s. Throughout the series, the infallible detective figure, Doctor Gideon Fell, is introduced to murder mysteries and casts of characters typical of the subgenre of fair-play whodunit of the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction. While Fell himself remains virtually unchanged in his eccentric characteristics from one narrative to the next, his expertise in psychology, psychoanalysis and how the human mind works evolve with the passing decades. His diagnoses are never incorrect, for the generic conventions guarantee his infallibility, and so he is allowed to assume the position of filling gaps in scientific knowledge, where such exist, and of reassuring others of their innocence. Fell's psychoanalytical knowledge imitates the notions held in society contemporary to the time of publication, as evidenced by the diagnoses he provides of female hysteria and hypersexuality in stories published in the 1940s. This knowledge coincides with the rising prominence and popular awareness of psychosexual conditions in society following World War II.

To contrast the various abnormalities – both deviant behavior and deviant behavior caused by mental disability – a normative character is featured prominently as the focalizer of each of the

analyzed narratives. This Watson-figure – an archetypal character of the subgenre – is intended to be as relatable as possible for the average reader, and as such they also showcase the viewpoint and perspective of the average person in the exclusive society of the novels when abnormality of any kind from social norms is encountered. The four Watsons then also act as contrasts to both the eccentric detective and the various abnormal figures the detective analyses: as dictated by generic convention, they do not conceal any of their thoughts from the reader – save for one lone occasion – and allow the reader to see their immediate reactions where nonconformity is encountered. These focalizers, who belong in the society of the novels, primarily narrate deviation from societal norms in terms of their immediate emotional responses, because they lack the psychological and generic knowledge of Doctor Fell and their feelings of puzzlement strengthen the sense of infallibility afforded to the detective.

Where the series does separate from the typical whodunit narrative of the subgenre is in its treatment of the abnormal characters. Criminally deviant individuals are condemned and excluded from society, but they are characterized by psychological motives and drives beyond those typically ascribed to the criminally deviant in the subgenre; where greed may be considered a typical motive for murder in the trappings of the fair-play whodunit, the criminals in the Gideon Fell series have something inherent in their true natures that allows them to commit murder or derive pleasure from socially abnormal behavior.

The male deviant, criminal or no, are often also further characterized by a mental immaturity; those men found deviant in the narratives are without exception seen as people who have somehow not left their childhoods behind or grown up. This holds true regardless of the generic archetype the deviant man belongs under – the deviant male criminal and victim alike are seen in the same light. The deviant men – Gore, Brooke, Merrick, Dawlish and Barclay – are all in one form or another the same people they were as when they were children: Gore still derives pleasure from his deviant behavior, and sees no wrong in anything he does, criminal or mischievous; Brooke and Merrick both



committed their initial crimes before their narratives begin in momentary childish anger or panic when matters do not go as they intend, and act rashly and erratically when Fell begins cornering them during his investigations; Dawlish and Barclay are expressly compared in their narrative, where Barclay is seen as a kind of Peter Pan, a boy who never grew up, Dawlish is seen as Captain Hook, a far more dangerous individual, but childish all the same. Fell's analysis of each person is very deterministic, as his summation of their true natures largely leads to the conclusion that these men only needed suitable conditions for them to commit deviant acts, criminal in each case save for Barclay – although even he is condemned for terrorizing his family and staff.

The only female character who is characterized as criminally deviant, Molly Farnleigh, is very similar to his male counterpart Patrick Gore. Molly's only directly stated reason for her criminal activities is the pleasure she derives from observing the effects of the hallucinogenic drugs she gives to her social circle, and no conventional submotive, such as greed, is ever uncovered by Fell. Where she thus also differs from the archetypal criminal is the importance given to her true deviant nature which only the detective can understand and uncover with his knowledge of psychology. However, unlike male deviance which only the detective has the ability to detect, Molly's deviant behavior is known by Madeline Dane, a 'normal woman' from the society. While Madeline never has conclusive proof of what Molly's actions were prior to Fell's investigation, she intimates that she was able to guess at them.

This matter of other women being able to detect female abnormality is recurrent in the novels of the series, but of the two other abnormal women analyzed – Fay and Margot – neither is truly treated as deviant, instead their abnormality or deviant behavior is brought on by mental disability. Other women instinctively detect even this kind of female abnormality, but treat it as deviation until Doctor Fell provides a more accurate diagnosis. Fay and Margot both are quite different from Molly in their reactions to their own socially abnormal behavior.

Fay, who Fell diagnoses as suffering from hypersexuality (a valid medical diagnosis at the time), is said to be painfully aware of how her condition compels her to behave and tries her best to fight it. Her condition can in many ways be viewed under the lens of disability, for the behavior it causes in her she herself views as torture and unwanted. Her true nature is that of constant conflict between her composed self-identity and an uncontrolled social identity which leads the English society to misconstrue her as a deviant individual. Significantly, the narrative shows Fay as being accepted in France regardless of her true nature, and only a slandering campaign from the criminal causes her to be shunned (though not for her hypersexuality even then). Both Fell and the Watson-figure attempt to prove her innocent of any wrongdoing, and help her become accepted. In the end, she marries the Watson-figure and is accepted, but it took nearly two decades for this to be confirmed within the series when she is mentioned again. By then, society in England had moved on and possible psychosexual conditions were no longer seen as a threat of any kind.

Margot, who does not receive the happy ending that Fay does, is not even aware she is any different from other people, as her physician is unwilling to tell her or her sister that she is suffering from sexual hysteria (an equally valid medical diagnosis at the time). However, she is still aware of the socially unacceptable nature of her extramarital affair with Ronald Merrick, and goes out of her way to attempt to conceal it until she can secure a divorce from her husband. Like Fay, much of the narrative deals with an attempt to rehabilitate both her and her sister of any possible wrongdoing or insanity. While her sister is declared perfectly sane, Margot's hysteria raises concerns in several of the listeners present when Fell begins his summation. Despite this, Fell is able to convey a sense of understanding to his drawing room audience, chiefly by theorizing that Margot's death was through no fault of her own. The way she and her behavior were misunderstood is said to have played a considerable role in how she was murdered, with her own control in her eventual fate largely decided for her.

Female abnormality and male abnormality then are both seen largely in deterministic ways – owing in part to the deterministic fashion that archetypal figures in the subgenre are expected by the readership to behave. Where the novels then partake in a real world discourse in defining normality and abnormality is when the psychological element is taken into consideration. Abnormal men are condemned and labeled as deviant, but women are not necessarily so labeled, if the women are constructed ultimately as disabled like Fay and Margot are.

Disability, mental or physical, is not seen as a basis for labeling any individual, rather it is seen as just a matter of inescapable nature to be understood. Patrick Gore, despite his legless nature, is condemned not because of his disability, but for his deviant true nature. Doctor Fell's mobility impairment is used as a means of more distinctly differentiating him from the normative Watsons, but it is never treated as making him somehow inferior to other, nondisabled characters. Mostly this is due to Fell's superhuman intelligence allowing him to function in society, so that his disability does not form a major hindrance to his role as an infallible, intellectual hero. Fay and Margot are seen as defined by their disabilities, but are ultimately not shunned for it. Both women are rehabilitated into society, albeit posthumously in Margot's case, and accepted for who they are by the other characters – even though in Fay's case confirming this took a considerable time and was left unclear in *He Who Whispers* itself.

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## Appendix

### Father Knox's Decalogue: The Ten Rules of (Golden Age) Detective Fiction (1929)

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

(Gregoriou 2007, 41)